

# Enhancing Spatial Literacy at Evelyn Scott School

## A Teacher Professional Learning Program



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# Narrative

This innovation addresses the gap in the design and delivery of new school environments – how to utilise new learning spaces.

Time and again, new school infrastructure is designed and built, after which designers and builders walk away, leaving school personnel with the task of adapting to their new spaces.

Without training or knowledge about space, and with little vocabulary for discussing shared spaces, innovative learning spaces can become a source of anxiety and frustration for educators rather than an opportunity.

The Making Space Teacher Professional Learning Program offers a solution to this issue. This initiative emerged from research as an interdisciplinary PhD collaboration between Dr Dion Tuckwell (Monash University) and Dr Fiona Young (Hayball).

In 2023, in collaboration with Jackie Vaughan, Founding Principal at Evelyn Scott School in Australia's capital, Canberra, the Making Space methodology was further developed to be scaled up for an entire P-10 school teacher cohort.



Narrative



Vistas along Molonglo Valley to Canberra

**Campus Heart:**  
Outdoor performance and gathering

**Bogon Moth Mural:**  
Local Ngunnawal artist

Entry gateway

**Entry forecourt:**  
Community gathering

EVELYN SCOTT SCHOOL IS A P-10 PUBLIC SCHOOL LOCATED IN CANBERRA, AUSTRALIA



## Narrative

Evelyn Scott School opened to primary school students in 2021 followed by high school students in 2023. It was designed to support the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Government's *The Future of Education* strategy<sup>1</sup>, which sets out an ambitious roadmap for all ACT schools to promote a future-focused education system.

**The school exhibits a wide variety of spatial settings**, from open-plan to breakout learning spaces, to enable a broad pedagogical repertoire including co-teaching, individualised conferencing, and small to whole-class group work.

Hayball, a national Australian architectural practice with a strong focus on culture, community and learning, developed the new school via a Design and Construct contract. With the absence of its school community prior to opening, the design was developed through a series of workshops with the ACT Education Directorate's Project Control Group. Founding Principal Jackie Vaughan was appointed in time to provide input into the interior design, however further staff were only appointed a month before the school opened.

**The school's vision was founded on three key principles – contemporary, community and connected.**

Jackie recognised that a missing piece in the implementation of this vision was the need to support staff in using the new spaces. Recognising the potential of the Making Space methodology to address this need, she worked with researchers Dr Fiona Young and Dr Dion Tuckwell to tailor a year-long Teacher Professional Learning Program for her staff. The aim of the program was to enhance teacher spatial literacy to optimise the potential of the school's innovative learning environments and support the future-focused learning vision.

**The program comprises five iterative workshops over the course of a year.** A carefully constructed sequence unfolds, beginning with the language of educators (learning principles) and bridging to the language of architecture and space.

Each session offers moments for reflection, connection, collaboration, and planning to explore questions that arise through workshop activities. This informs subsequent action research projects.

Teachers are issued Field Guides to capture their reflections, while an online platform allows ongoing dialogue and the sharing of findings across the Evelyn Scott School community of practice.

**Ongoing feedback received over the course of the program has overwhelmingly demonstrated an evolution in teachers' perceptions and use of their spaces.** This often ranges from not being conscious of the physical environment at all, to seeing that space can support different learners' needs, to realising that teachers can work together to utilise spaces to benefit everyone.

**Importantly, this process has empowered teachers to harness space as part of their practice.**

Embracing the Making Space Teacher Professional Learning Program was a bold move for Evelyn Scott School, however its continuation into a second year demonstrates the positive impact it continues to have. This exemplar highlights to other schools the need to address the challenging gap between innovative practice and innovative space and how the Making Space program is uniquely placed to do this.



**“I have never worked in a school that provides staff with access to this type of professional development, and I can see the positive impact it has on learning and engagement across our P-10 school.**

ERIN CLARKE, SENIOR  
CAMPUS LEARNING COACH,  
EVELYN SCOTT SCHOOL

O-Week: Agency

Workshop 1: Enablers and Constraints

Workshop 2: Community of Practice

Teacher survey

Workshop 3: Shared Expectations Part 1

Workshop 4: Shared Expectations Part 2

O-Week: Empowering Practice

Teacher feedback

Workshop 1: Co-Creating a User Manual

Workshop 2: Reframing Student Agency

2023

2024

<sup>1</sup> ACT Education Directorate. (2018). *The Future of Education: An ACT education strategy for the next ten years*. Retrieved from <https://www.education.act.gov.au>

# Value Alignment

## 1. What need inspired your innovation and how does it help students and the community?

This innovation originally stemmed from the Innovative Learning Environments and Teacher Change (ILETC) project initiated by The University of Melbourne's Learning Environments Applied Research Network (LEARN) team.

This major Australian Research Council funded project sought to understand how teachers could harness the untapped potential of Innovative Learning Environments (ILEs) to improve learning outcomes for students.

The project addressed the following issue: **governments around the world were investing billions of dollars annually in public education infrastructure, yet there was a need for a deeper understanding of the relationships between pedagogy and space to inform future decision-making based on research and evidence.**

Critically, the project aimed to examine the support required to assist teachers in realising the potential of space as a component of their pedagogical practice and assess the impact of this 'change' on student learning.

The Making Space Teacher Professional Learning Program emerged from this research as a product of the collaborative and interdisciplinary PhD studies of Dr Dion Tuckwell (Monash University) and Dr Fiona Young (Hayball).

**Its implementation at Evelyn Scott School has enabled the scaling up of this process from PhD fieldwork, demonstrating its applicability to a whole-school context.**

“Sharing ideas with other teachers and hearing what they were thinking was the most valuable part of this workshop.”

SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHER, EVELYN SCOTT SCHOOL



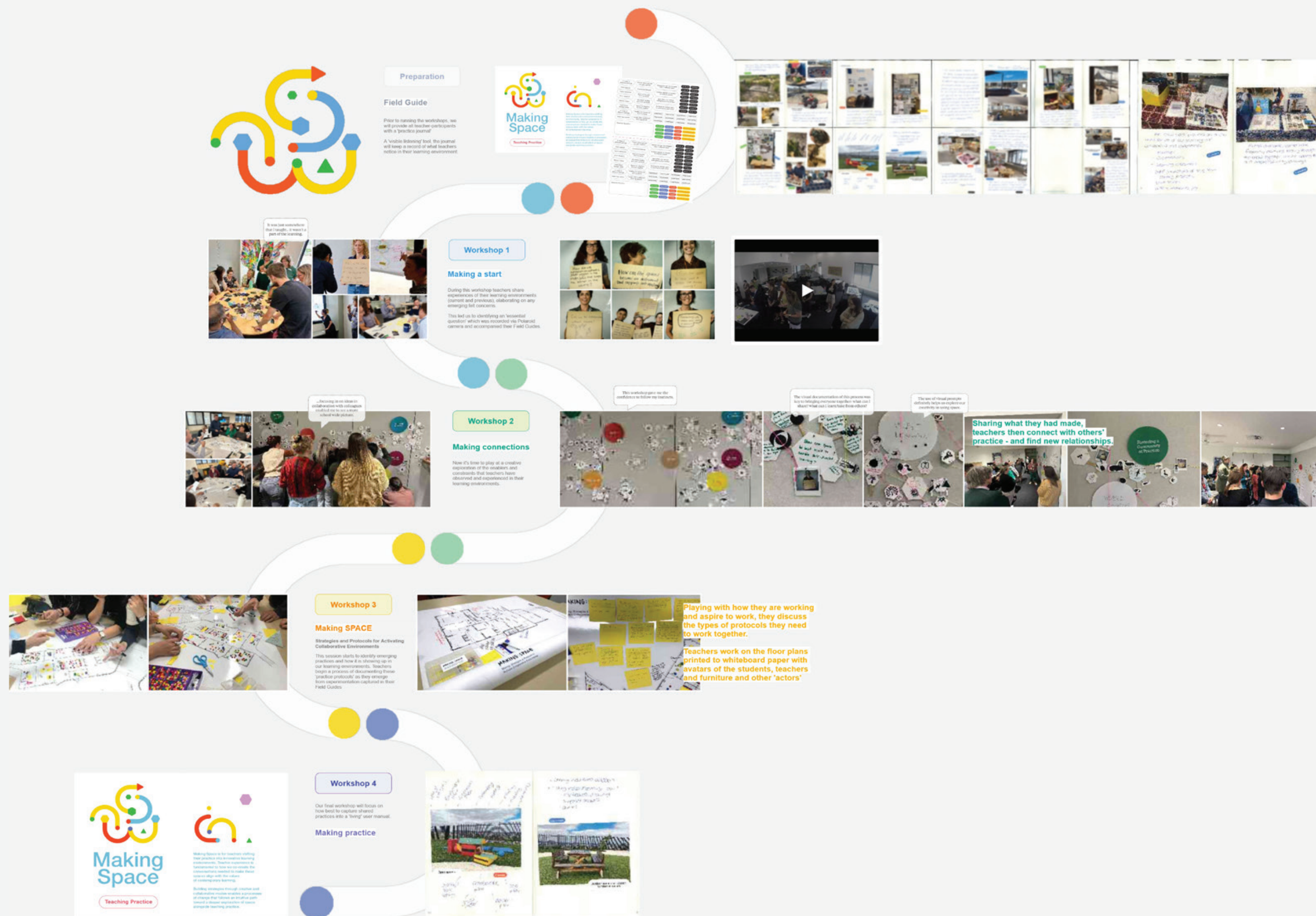
## Value Alignment

The inaugural 2023 professional learning program at Evelyn Scott School comprised five workshops including one during orientation (O-Week) and then one per school term.

It was based on the tools developed through Dion and Fiona's research, and it also drew upon the expertise of education consultant Dr Julia Atkin who was instrumental in the creation of *The Future of Education* strategy, and also Hayball principal and architect Richard Leonard who led the creation of the CEFPI (now known as the Association for Learning Environments) *Learning Furniture: A 'Don't Just Stuff It' Guide* facilitator's exercise.

While the framework was largely based on the Making Space methodology developed through Dion and Fiona's PhDs, **this work needed to be scaled up to a population of over 50 teachers and contextualised to the culture of the school.**

Dion and Fiona worked closely with the school's founding principal to ensure that each workshop's focus aligned with the school's language, learning principles, and concurrent professional learning relating to Project Based Learning.



## Value Alignment

O-Week (orientation week) at Evelyn Scott School comprises three days of teacher development prior to the beginning of each school year, and the Making Space Professional Learning Program launched with a full day dedicated to space. This was followed by one workshop per term, based on a participatory action research cycle.

**The program has not only fostered a deeper understanding among teachers of the relationships between pedagogy and space but has also enabled them to become researchers of their own practice.** This has enhanced their spatial literacy and empowered them to collectively harness the potential of their spaces.

**Student voice has been incorporated into this process, raising awareness of the value of diversity in pedagogical practices and spaces that support this.** This incorporation has given teachers a greater focus and a sense of purpose as they co-design how teaching and learning look and feel in their spaces.

Provocations arising from the Making Space program have been integrated into daily activities and, in particular, at the preschool level, made visible for the whole community to engage in discussions.

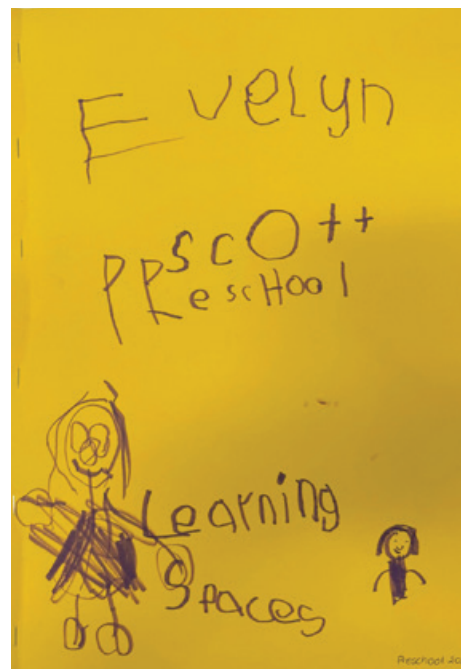
The Making Space Professional Learning Program has enabled teachers to use an evidence-based language with families around the use of teaching and learning spaces. Teachers can explain to parents how the space facilitates the learning and provide reassurance about the learning model simultaneously.

“Many learners said that the floor was not a good place to learn as it is uncomfortable. They said it’s too hard and they don’t like sitting on it for very long.”

PRESCHOOL TEACHER, EVELYN SCOTT SCHOOL

RIGHT: PRESCHOOL NOTICEBOARD SHOWING THE 2024 SHARED ESSENTIAL QUESTION. THIS IS ONE EXAMPLE OF HOW THE TEACHER PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PROGRAM IS INFLUENCING WHOLE-SCHOOL CULTURE CHANGE WITH THE COMMUNITY.

BELOW: EXHIBITS IN THE REFRAMING STUDENT AGENCY WORKSHOP



## 2. What educational environment planning opportunities does your innovation address?

This Professional Learning program transforms the traditional approach to designing and delivering school buildings, where there is often minimal crossover between architects and users, and limited support for teachers in utilising space.

As Dr Raechel French notes, “The process and preparation required to transition is often ignored by the schools themselves, resulting in little emergence of new teaching and learning practices, despite the new spaces” (French et al., 2019).

**Essentially, this process is key to bridging the gap between design and use, which is crucial for realising the intent of innovative learning environments.**

Given the complexity of schools, as ecosystems comprising interrelated spheres of organisational structures, pedagogical practices, and both physical and virtual spaces (refer diagram), this program consciously integrates these different domains by using space as a lens to explore and evolve school culture and practice.

Making Space offers users ‘Strategies and Protocols to Activate Collaborative Environments,’ addressing the ultimate challenge of evolving from solo practice within traditional classrooms to collaborative teaching and learning in Innovative Learning Environments (ILEs).

**Making Space builds user capability by empowering teachers to activate their practice within new types of space.**

This Professional Learning program showcases a scalable approach to realising the potential of significant investments in the design and development of new schools and ILEs. It provides a key to shifting teachers’ mindsets and practices towards transforming learning to meet the needs of contemporary learners.

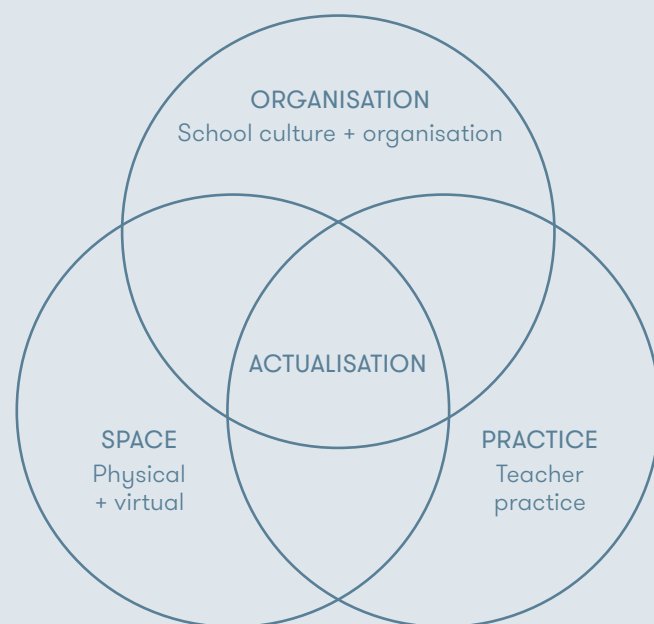


DIAGRAM: YOUNG, F. (2021). LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AFFORDANCES: BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN POTENTIAL, PERCEPTION AND PRACTICE. [PHD THESIS]



“...focusing in on ideas in collaboration with colleagues enabled me to see a more school-wide picture.”

LEARNING COACH,  
EVELYN SCOTT SCHOOL

### 3. What are the cost impacts of implementing the innovation? How can costs be mitigated for underserved communities?

All ACT Government public schools are allocated a teacher professional learning budget, which has funded the implementation of the Making Space Teacher Professional Learning Program at Evelyn Scott School.

While the program is personalised to reflect the unique culture of each school, it is based on an overarching framework developed and tested through rigorous PhD research, which streamlines program delivery.

**The cost to run the program is based on a per-workshop fee.** This fee includes ongoing liaison with the principal to develop each successive workshop, interaction with teachers to offer feedback on their action research, and synthesising data from workshops to inform future iterations.

On one level, the engagement between Hayball, Monash University and Evelyn Scott School embeds Dion and Fiona as in-house designers into the school. On another level, it also builds the skillset of all Evelyn Scott School staff as designers, empowering them to shape the future spaces they will inhabit.

Recognising the sophisticated and holistic context in which this program operates, it has had a high impact at a low cost and offers a quality return on investment by supporting the school to achieve the goals of *The Future of Education* strategy by the state government.

**Tools from the program have been shared at conferences, and some will be made freely available from the Making Space website** (currently under construction). Additionally, other strategies to support schools via online engagement are being explored.



“The longitudinal nature (of the Making Space professional learning program) and the fact that we get to follow a cycle that is all linked to our school’s Pedagogical Framework is amazing!”

We are being given time to do it well, time to develop goals within that process, and permission to be really meta-cognitive about it.

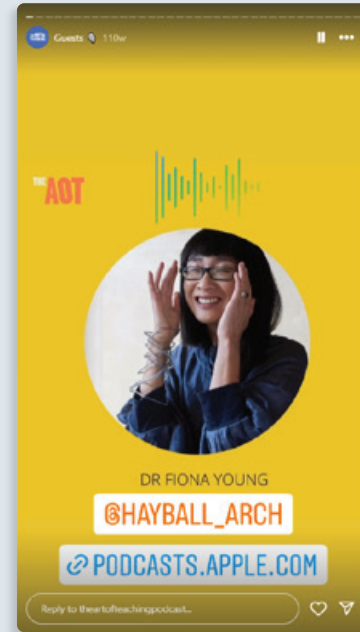
I have seen the growth between 2023 and 2024 and the impact that this program has had across our P-10 school. There are no rooms with traditional set-ups and no classrooms – only learning spaces. The spaces are far more purposefully imagined this year.

The professional learning has been invigorating. It has been great to recognise an interdisciplinary perspective and see the school through the eyes of architects.

There is a real comfort in being able to continue this learning deeply.

ANNA BODLE,  
TEACHER LIBRARIAN,  
EVELYN SCOTT SCHOOL

#### 4. How have you shared and/or communicated your innovation and made it available to those who need it?



##### Research paper

While the original Making Space methodology was shared through the [research paper](#) titled “**Actualising the Affordances of Innovative Learning Environments Through Co-creating Practice Change with Teachers**” (a copy of which is provided in Part 6 of this submission), the Evelyn Scott School program has since extended this research by demonstrating how it can be scaled up across a whole P-10 school.

##### Conferences

Dr Dion Tuckwell, Jackie Vaughan, and Dr Fiona Young have shared this program at the **EduTECH International Congress and Expo** (Melbourne, 2023), Australia’s largest conference and exhibition for educators and providers. They also presented at **Doing School Differently** (Brisbane, June 2024), a leading Australian conference for those committed to developing and sustaining successful educational opportunities and pathways for young people who have experienced barriers to education.

##### Podcast

Fiona, Jackie and Dion recorded an interview with Sydney-based educator Mathew Green, host of **The Art of Teaching Podcast**, (97,000+ downloads), discussing the Making Space Professional Learning Program at Evelyn Scott School which will be released shortly.

##### Webinar

Fiona and Jackie discussed the program delivered at Evelyn Scott School during an engaging two-part **Learning Environments Australasia (LEA) webinar series** in July 2024. They explained how this ongoing professional learning aims to enhance learner agency through the co-creation of strategies and protocols for activating collaborative environments.

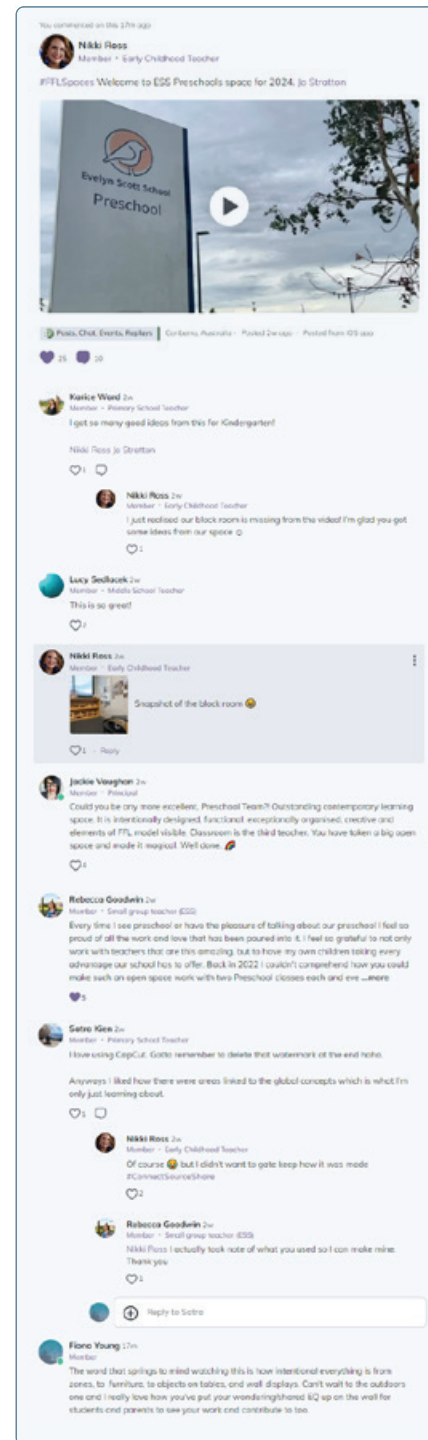
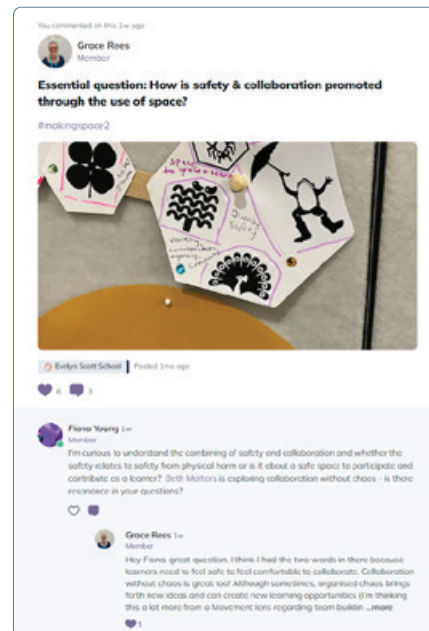
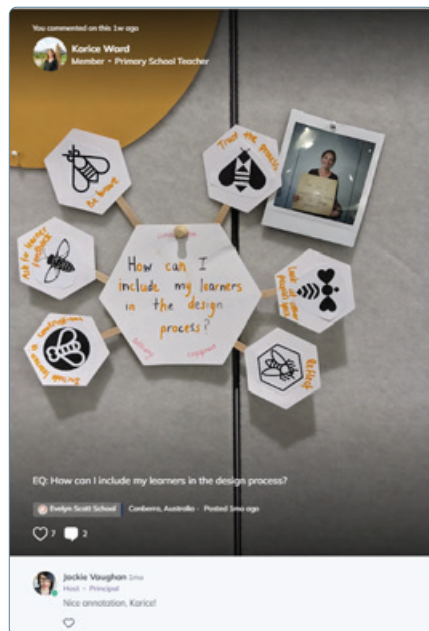
##### Making Space online launch

The ongoing work regarding the Making Space methodology is being shared publicly online. We have launched an **Instagram feed**, and we are also scheduled to launch a **website** very shortly. This website will provide further details about the Evelyn Scott School program and aim to support others in educational facility planning who face similar challenges and opportunities.

##### Case study

The **Future Focused Learning Network**, a global community dedicated to advancing excellence in education, has published a case study titled “Making the Shift at Evelyn Scott School.” This case study highlights how learners at Evelyn Scott School have gained genuine agency over their own learning. It also explores the impact of the Making Space Teacher Professional Learning Program on this transformation.

## Value Alignment



## Online sharing platform

The outputs from Evelyn Scott School's professional learning program have been shared through the school's **Future-Focused Learning platform**. This platform facilitates ongoing conversations between school staff and workshop facilitators (Dr Dion Tuckwell and Dr Fiona Young) beyond each workshop session.



## 5. How have you balanced personal and professional goals with implementation of the innovation?

As passionate educators and designers, our personal and professional goals align closely. **Our driving purpose is to positively impact the world, focusing on the development of students and young people as the next generation of stewards who will influence societal and environmental outcomes.**

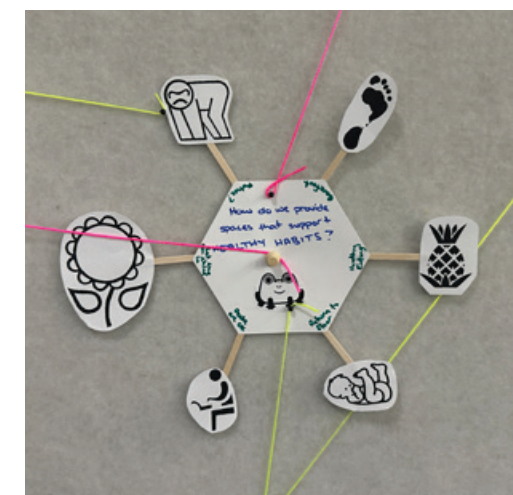
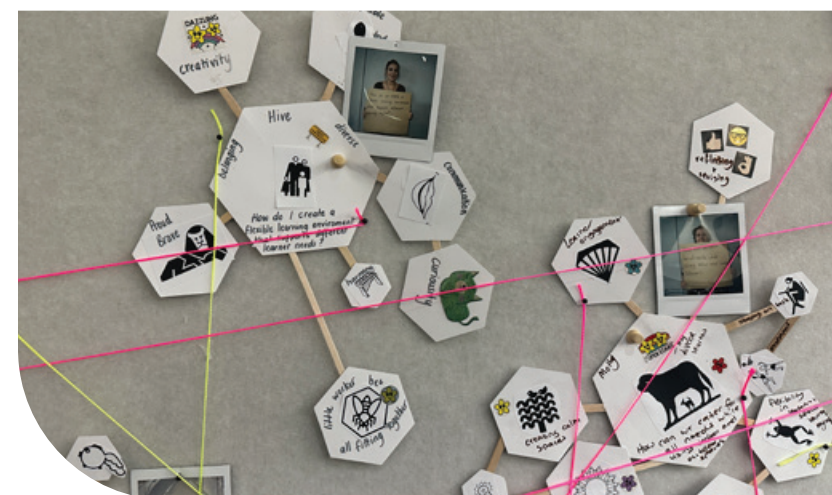
With a greater awareness of the diversity and neurodiversity of individual learners, it is clear that space can play a crucial role in supporting a broader pedagogical repertoire to help all learners thrive.

Principals and their staff are routinely allocated new buildings and spaces for teaching and learning, yet this often occurs without adequate training or support to empower teachers in utilising these spaces effectively. We have observed that other schools encounter this problem as well and recognise it as a significant gap, with few existing solutions to address it.

We believe that evolving and implementing the Making Space Teacher Professional Learning Program provides a solution to this gap. We are committed to continuing to share this initiative with schools locally, nationally, and globally, to highlight the existing gap and demonstrate how our approach can address it.

“The Making Space professional learning program has been incredibly valuable. It has been a unique learning opportunity – one that I haven’t experienced across my career. It allows teachers to take a deep dive into our learning spaces across various planes and has changed the way I view my learning space and how it is utilised. I had never realised there was so much behind it all!

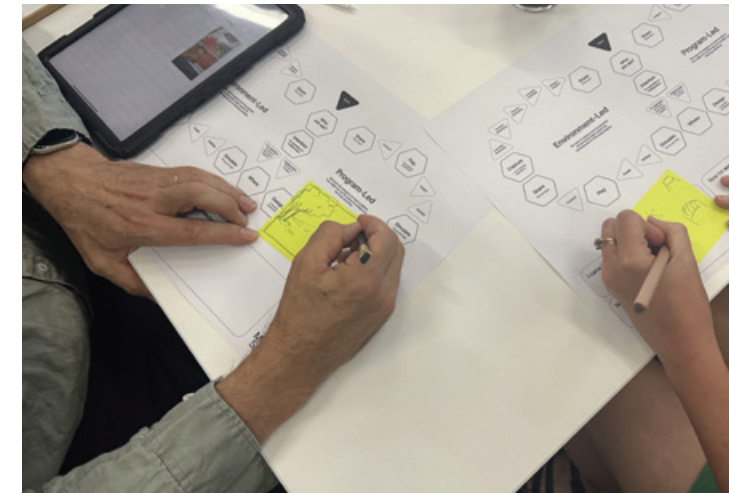
LUCY SEDLACEK, SENIOR CAMPUS TEACHER, EVELYN SCOTT SCHOOL



“It helped me to think of ways we can work together to utilise spaces to benefit everyone.

PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHER,  
EVELYN SCOTT SCHOOL

## Value Alignment



“The new knowledge I have gained from our ongoing engagement with the architects makes me feel confident that our learning spaces are supporting myself, our learners, and our learning model at Evelyn Scott School.

EMMY HASTER, SENIOR CAMPUS TEACHER, EVELYN SCOTT SCHOOL





## Value Alignment

To evaluate the program's impact, a two-part teacher survey was conducted to assess teachers' perceptions of space both before and after their participation.

The first survey was administered in August 2023, midway through the professional learning program. After completing the remaining workshops, teachers provided additional feedback through a follow-up survey in February 2024.

The results highlighted how each session influenced teachers' understanding of the potential of space and showed how their perceptions evolved throughout the program.

Additionally, a student survey was conducted as part of the program to inform Workshop 2 in 2024, which focused on student agency.

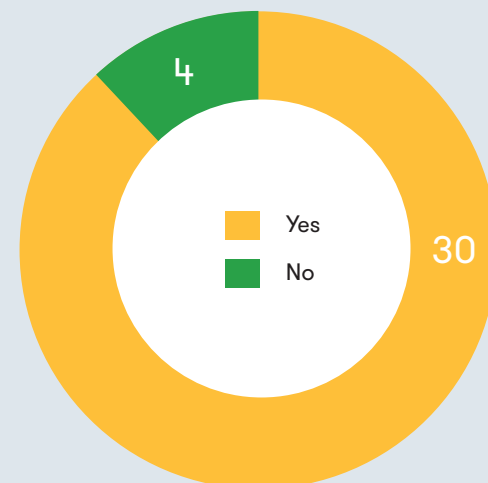
This survey provided teachers with authentic feedback from students on aspects such as organisation, co-design, diversity of pedagogy, and learning preferences within their learning spaces.

The results enabled teachers to gather both qualitative and quantitative data, which they used to further enhance their practice.

The physical changes in the environment resulting from the program have led to positive outcomes for students across the school. These include improved play interactions among preschool learners, increased emotional regulation and a stronger sense of belonging at the primary school level, and enhanced engagement and self-direction at the high school level.



During Making Space workshop 1, we explored the relationship of spatial qualities with learning principles. Did this session reveal insights into your teaching practice?



EXAMPLE FROM  
TEACHER SURVEY, AUGUST 2023

“I feel like I belong to this school because of all the effort the staff put into our spaces and lessons for my peers. I feel connected to our school because we have positive relationships with each other, we have a safe environment around us, and we have a great system of learning that I really love.”

SENIOR CAMPUS STUDENT, EVELYN SCOTT SCHOOL

## 7. What success has your innovation achieved?

During Term 2, 2024, Evelyn Scott School underwent two external evaluations, both of which produced outstanding reports, particularly concerning the Making Space initiative.

**The first evaluation was the Student-Centered Improvement Visit (SCIV).**

A panel of experts, including fellow principals and the Director of School Improvement for the South/Weston Network in ACT, visited the school for a day to conduct comprehensive observations and interviews.

Before the visit, the principal collaborated with the panel to focus on the 'Leading' Domain, specifically investigating the line of inquiry: 'Professional learning that shifts practice.' This focus was chosen to assess the impact of professional learning at Evelyn Scott School, especially the effect of the Making Space workshops.

“The principal shared a deep commitment to the professional learning improvement agenda which was evidenced across the junior and senior school. This innovative work at Evelyn Scott School has been recognised as a category winner at the recent 2024 Learning Environments Australasia Design Awards. The vision of the principal to create one school P-10 has been deliberate and intentional through recruitment, professional learning, physical resources and environmental print.

“The continuity of evidence for learning from preschool to high school was impressive. All focal points of this visit (visible learning, environmental print and student agency) were observed across all sectors of the school. Walking through the different areas of the school you get a real sense of 'one school'.

“A wide variety of spatial settings were observed, which have been intentionally designed and constructed by teachers and leaders to allow for a broad range of pedagogies and access for learners.

“The Future Focused Learning Network provides a 'live' space that encompasses the research, the artefacts, relating to professional learning that staff are engaged, as well as opportunities to share how this is being implemented in classrooms, and celebrate professional successes and discuss problems of practice.



Scan the QR code for a short video that captures O-Week 2023



**The second external evaluation was the Preschool Ratings and Assessment Report.**

Evelyn Scott School Preschool achieved an Excellent rating in all seven Quality areas, which is a rare and outstanding accomplishment.

As a result of this assessment, the preschool is eligible to apply for an overall Excellent rating. External assessors have encouraged the staff and Leadership Team to pursue this.

If successful, Evelyn Scott School Preschool would join an elite group of early childhood settings nationally that have earned this Excellent rating.

“A community of practice was fostered over numerous years between the school and the architects who designed and built the school, including the service’s educators. During regular reflective (Making Space) workshops, educators have reviewed and adapted resources, furniture, and the service as a whole. The architects are accessible outside workshops, and had created reflective booklets to record educators’ reflections, thoughts, and analyses regarding their learning environments and engagement.

“Recording the why and how, with photos and annotations, has supported educators to enhance learning environments across the service, including the primary and high school spaces. These, along with discussions and practices during the visit, demonstrated robust reflection across multiple perspectives and situations with the inclusion of contemporary theoretical approaches, and were used to support the service’s advocacy work within the Future-Focused Network with placement students and local early childhood services.

“Regular, collaborative, and reflective workshops with Hayball architects, Monash University and the educators offer opportunities for professional input and recommendations. These sessions help ensure that repairs and modifications address safety, innovation, and contextual appropriateness.



## Value Alignment

Although this program was not initially intended as a Post Occupancy Evaluation (POE) tool, we recognise its significant value. It not only informs users and designers about the benefits and challenges of space but also supports educators in reflecting on and improving their individual and collective practices in Innovative Learning Environments (ILEs).

Before participating in this professional learning program, teachers often did not see 'space' as a resource for learning. As one primary teacher noted, "It was just somewhere that I taught – it wasn't a part of the learning." Over the course of the program, we have observed a marked growth in teachers' understanding and utilisation of their learning spaces.

This evolution is exemplified by the Teacher Librarian's comment: "I have seen the growth between 2023 and 2024 and the impact that this professional learning has had across our P-10 school. The spaces are far more purposefully designed this year. There are no rooms with traditional set-ups, no classrooms – only learning spaces."

Feedback from teacher and student surveys, as shown in the Occupancy Evaluation document attached in Part 6, further supports this transformation. We are delighted with the impact that this program has had and continues to have at Evelyn Scott School.

The success of this program in shifting teachers' perspectives on space as a tool for supporting their practice has led to its continuation into 2024.

This year, the program is following a similar structure with five workshops throughout the year, each aimed at co-designing a learning environment user manual. This manual will serve as a wayfinder to guide both current and future teachers through the ongoing challenge of collaborative practice within an ILE space.

In May 2024, the program was proudly recognised at a national level, winning the award for 'An Innovative Educational Initiative' at the Learning Environments Australasia Design (LEAD) Awards.



This exemplary project addresses the urgent and important issue of how professional learning for teachers working in new or renovated spaces may best occur.

*Enhancing Spatial Literacy* functions collaboratively, is focused on learning for students, operates transparently and equitably, ensures continuous improvement, and draws generously on multiple forms of knowledge.

JURY CITATION, 2024 LEAD AWARDS  
WINNER, AN INNOVATIVE EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVE

DR DION TUCKWELL,  
JACKIE VAUGHAN, AND  
DR FIONA YOUNG PROUDLY  
ACCEPTING THE AWARD FOR  
AN INNOVATING EDUCATIONAL  
INITIATIVE FROM LEA AND A4LE  
REPRESENTATIVES AT THE  
2024 LEAD AWARDS

## 8. What is the realistic potential for expanding its impact?

Principal Jackie Vaughan leads regular school tours for visitors, including designers and educators, and has observed significant interest in the Making Space Teacher Professional Learning Program.

While the concept of collaborative spaces may be familiar to many, they are often surprised to learn about a program specifically designed to support teachers in collaborating within these spaces.

We have realised that creating a similar program from scratch would be challenging, as no one else has developed something quite like this.

**The year-long professional development methodology offers a unique approach that can be adopted by other schools undergoing spatial and organisational transformation. It recognises the interplay between pedagogical practice and space, and opens new avenues for post-occupancy evaluation.**

The Making Space framework not only reveals how spaces are currently perceived and used but also helps teachers gain deeper insights into how to leverage space to support contemporary learning practices.

We see great potential to expand the impact of this program. Sharing the story of Making Space and the Evelyn Scott School Teacher Professional Learning Program is crucial at this stage.

Winning the Learning Environments Australasia Design (LEAD) Awards' Innovative Educational Initiative category this year has significantly helped in promoting this work, leading to inquiries from other principals and education leaders in the Australian states of New South Wales and Tasmania interested in implementing similar programs.

Our contacts in Tasmania's Department of Education see the potential to scale this program system-wide, and we have invited them to join us at the next workshop in Term 3 to explore collaboration opportunities.

The program exemplifies the growth of expertise within a school. Fiona and Dion have long admired Jackie's vision and commitment in pioneering the Making Space methodology at her school. Jackie has since up-skilled and gained confidence as a designer, co-creating the program with us and guiding her staff in the process.

Looking ahead, we have adapted the Making Space program as an independent entity to enhance its flexibility and reach a broader range of schools across various geographies and socio-economic backgrounds.

Expanding the impact of the Making Space Teacher Professional Learning Program aligns with our goals of making a positive difference in educational design.

**Success in winning the A4LE Kelley Tanner Innovation Award would provide a global platform to highlight the gap between design and use and showcase how the Making Space methodology can bridge this gap for schools worldwide.**

