

Professor Anne Taylor A Designer of Schools for Children

by Neal Singer

University of New Mexico Architecture and Planning Professor Anne Taylor shows the fervor of a prophet in her school designs, writings and talks to parents, teachers and administrators as far away as Nome, Alaska on the importance of the built environment as a tool to aid the learning processes of children.

Her work takes several forms.

Through her independently-owned company, School Zone Inc., Taylor puts her design principles in action by programming and designing school environments on a national basis.

Through the Institute for Environmental Education, an independently-funded resource center headed by herself and Architecture and Planning Professor Wolfgang Preiser at UNM, the articulate former graduate dean sends architecture students into Albuquerque-area schools to teach grade school students math, physics, geography and other subjects through architectural and environmental means.

She breathes new life into the term, "holistic."

She sees schools, on the one hand, as functioning little villages, complete with their own greenhouses and home economics departments for growing and preparing food. Metal, wood and auto shops can create or fix objects. Graphics and arts studios can decorate the environment.

"For children learning to read, graphics can be learning tools," she says, "and paint is an inexpensive architectural membrane to change.

"Children can make furniture and design landscapes instead of taking home tie racks."

Designing so that already-accepted specialty courses can actually change a school's environment is one aspect of her vision.

Designing thusly, she feels-and to some degree has already proven-will involve students in the school structure, causing them to become protectors and indeed augmentors of the built environment, rather than its vandalizers. Her contention is that as a partial result of the students' environmental involvement, their attendance, study concentration and therefore grades rise.

At a renovation project she headed at the Albuquerque Indian School, for example, students were so involved in the school's re-design that both a horrendous vandalism and drop-out rate were brought down to practically zero.

In all her work, Taylor solicits student input both before and after a school is constructed.

"I talk to administrators and teachers too," says Taylor, who over the last ten years has programmed schoolroom design from Arizona to Alaska, "but the real clients are the children."

Programming is a prior step to design, Taylor explains, and is not part of the training of most architects.

"The client may not want to pay to hire a programming consultant, and the architect may not want to



A kindergarten room in Monte Vista Elementary School designed by Anne Taylor. The teacher in the photograph is Bob Evans.

pay for it either," she said. "Yet interior designers are hired, as are electro-mechanical consultants."

Programming generally costs one-half to one percent of the overall building project budget.

To ensure that the program Taylor creates for each project has married architecture to the learning process, she uses a "Basic Needs Chart" which vertically lists physical categories such as occupant load, area requirements, floors, ceiling, height, lighting, color graphics, storage, hazards, flexibility, visual access, communication technology and socialization possibilities.

Horizontally, the chart categorizes the subject matter disciplines of math, life sciences, physical sciences, art, music and physical education.

The blank boxes of the intersecting matrix provide spaces to introduce a relevant architectural concept which reflects subject matter concepts.

"Thus," says Taylor, "architecture and landscaping become learning tools in themselves."

Exposed pipes in a physics room or geometric shapes incorporated into the design of a mathematics room are examples of this idea.

Because of her policy of taking client polls both before and after the designing and construction before and after the designing and construction of a building, she feels she has grown as a school programmer.

"If you get a negative post-occupancy evaluation, that's the chance you take," she said, noting that

various widely-perceived architectural failures have not stopped the perpetrators from landing more school design jobs.

It is when Taylor talks about the need for design changes in the school structures of today that her speech becomes urgent.

"Architects have got to train the educators to use the new architecture," she says, "if it involves writing a user's manual and working with the teachers to make sure they understand it. It may mean stating, 'I will donate my time once a month to come in to work with students to keep this building a dynamic, living architectural experience."

"We have left education to educators for so long, and everyone is dissatisfied with it. All people especially architects need to take responsibility for American education."

Taylor, who holds a doctoral degree in art education, says that "children's needs are not for seats and rows. A school design may meet safety standards while ignoring psychological and aesthetic standards. The rooms may not even be built functionally for the teaching of the future: the computer doesn't fit in the traditionally-designed classroom.

"Aesthetically, the school should be a joyful place so that kids like to be there. Yet architects put windows in banks and greenhouses in restaurants but close up schools.

"I want to put things in front of children that will make them sensitive enough to their environment that they will want to consult an architect when they grow up. But most kids grow up not knowing what an architect is."

Architects should go into the schools voluntarily a few times a year, she says again. "Call up a principal, call upon a superintendent and volunteer. Not only will the children learn in a new way, but teachers get excited because they never thought of linking the built environment to the teaching of subject matter."

Student architects in her university program have brought scale models of rooms into classrooms to teach

conversion of feet to inches as well as geometric layouts. The models also convey the awareness that people chose the shape and contents of a school room.

In one school Taylor programmed in Alaska for severely and profoundly handicapped children, a laundry room taught folding and other physical and survival skills as well as the mathematics of change-making in coin operated machines.

"Cultural determinants can come into awareness in design," she says. "Why should a school in Santa Rosa look like a school in Minnesota? Indigenous buildings should be different."

Community meetings she has conducted before designing schools have led her into further possibilities for the public buildings she programs. "A school doesn't have to be just a school, in use for a few hours a day," she says. It can be a health club, a library, a 24 hour day care. Maybe parents in the community want art studios they can use and not just classrooms."

Among her projects has been the programming, designing and provisioning of three Alaskan-sited child care centers for the U. S. Navy, the Coast Guard and the Providence Hospital in Anchorage. The three projects totalled in excess of six million dollars.

Environmental modifications based on her design have commenced on a public school in Corrales, New Mexico. She estimates the work will cost a quarter million dollars.

She has written several books on her projects and ideas. The latest, **School Zone: Learning Environments for Children**, is in its second printing and is available from Horizon Communications in Albuquerque.

The institute she co-heads is listed in the American Institute of Architecture Sourcebook as one of four agencies in the U.S. to be used as a resource for those interested in using architecture as a teaching tool.

"Over twenty billion dollars in school renovations needs to be done in this country," she said. N.S.

Continuing Schedule of Events School of Architecture and Planning University of New Mexico

Monday Lecture Series:

Lectures begin at 5:30 p.m. at SUB Theater, Student Union

Monday, 4 November	9	Stuart Dawson Principal, Sasaki Associates, Dallas <i>"Landscape Architecture and Architecture by Sasaki Associates"</i>
Monday, 11 November	10	Craig W. Hartman and Robert P. Holmes Partners, Skidmore, Owings and Merrill <i>"The Work of S.O.M."</i>
Monday, 18 November	11	Daniel F. Solomon Architect, San Francisco <i>"House and Town"</i>

Exhibitions

At the School of Architecture and Planning

November 4—29

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The Work of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill