

EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES RESEARCH IN ONTARIO

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Formation

Increasing costs, rapid growth and changing educational philosophies resulted in a need for more detailed information on the planning and development of educational facilities. As the Minister of Education in Ontario, Honourable Robert Welch, pointed out in the introductory remarks at the presentation of the Department of Education's 1971-72 Estimates to the Legislature's Committee on Human Resources on July 16, 1971:

".... we are now turning more of our attention from the quantitative to the qualitative aspects of education in Ontario.

Today we are standing on the threshold of a new era in society as we approach the life of our province - and the lives of each individual in this province - with a renewed emphasis on the priority of truly human values. And although this shift toward greater human responsiveness is reflected in virtually all aspects of society, nowhere is it more evident than in the Department of Education. In fact, this emphasis is an integral part of virtually every one of our programs.

In a democratic society that values the individual, education is not satisfactory unless it recognises the unique personality, the unique abilities, needs, and interests, and the unique aspirations of each individual student."

To help fulfil this need the office of School Planning and Building Research was formed in June 1964. Since that time the office has continued to develop and at present has a multi-disciplined staff representing different educational backgrounds and cultures from around the world.

Activities

a. Members of the staff are involved in a continuing program of research into facilities for elementary and secondary schools with the assistance of educators and other experts invited to participate. The studies range through all areas of the curriculum.

b. With the formation of Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology in 1968, a new dimension was added. Research is carried out on prospective construction projects from conceptual stage to completion. It covers all aspects of the proposed structure from educational purposes through site, facilities, materials, planning and execution, a comprehensive process in which the question of cost-economics is given high priority. At present there are 20 of these community colleges in operation.

c. The cost analysis group of school planning involves itself in the investigation of the nature and trend of school and college construction costs,

undertakes reviews of expenditures and continually studies the provincial capital grant plan.

d. The office provides guidance and assistance in anticipating the future needs of educational facilities and investigates the current requirements for space utilization to meet educational programs. It also researches new construction techniques and materials to define the most appropriate building forms through economic design and construction.

e. The office also conducts research in the area of special education, including schools for the deaf, blind and emotionally disturbed.

f. The office provides a consultation service for those involved in school building. It co-operates with the Ontario Teachers' Federation, County Boards of Education and others. Contacts are maintained with other provinces of Canada, UNESCO agencies and school research groups throughout the world.

Workshops

School Planning and Building Research holds two School Design Workshops a year and a College Design Workshop every other year. The general theme of this continuing series of meetings is education and architecture in the 20th century.

The purpose of the workshops is to bring together persons with diverse backgrounds and occupations who are interested in some way in the construction of educational facilities. All too frequently, seminars, conferences and conventions are restricted to the narrow confines of the interests of a single profession. This only leads to a ghettoization of the approach to problem solving. The aim of the School Planning workshops is the cross-fertilization of ideas and concepts from a multi-disciplinary grouping. Architects, planners, engineers, professional educators - both those on the classroom front and behind the scenes in administration - together with elected school board officials, who represent the community, concerned parents and members of boards of governors of the 20 community colleges in Ontario are invited to spend an intense two days discussing the problems of planning and building educational facilities.

Workshop locations are carefully slotted through various locales in the province. Each meeting is planned to provide a regional interpretation of the problems discussed and to accentuate local participation. This does not mean that the workshops are inbred affairs. Far from it, all the seminars have had delegates and participants not only from all parts of Ontario, but from the other provinces of Canada and from abroad.

Care is always taken to locate the meetings in the same building where the majority of those attending are staying. This is done to encourage the informal exchange of ideas between meetings and at after-hours "bull sessions". For this reason the registration fee includes meals. Lunch or dinner can provide a better opportunity to pursue a topic of interest in depth than the necessarily time-restricted question periods in the more structured discussions. School Planning believes that the informal exchange of ideas and the non-structured meetings with cohorts can be as significant a benefit from the workshop as the actual program.

The program is carefully worked out to offer a wide range of topics to interest and involve the multi-disciplinary participants. Usually an overall theme is established for the workshops:

School as a Community Resource
Alternative Spaces for Education
New Techniques in Construction Contracts
Control of Environment
The Systems Approach to Construction

The technique of panel discussions is frequently employed both in general sessions and discussion groups to present the multi-disciplinary picture. Panels frequently include an educator, administrator, trustee and an architect. Specialists such as engineers, cost analysts or TV consultants are invited according to the topic.

Panelists are urged to give their frank opinions and lively discussions are sought. The larger sessions always allow a question period at the end while in the small groups less formalized participation is encouraged.

Many memorable sessions have been held including the time Dr. Gores, head of Educational Facilities Laboratories, observed:

"If we could only get from teaching over to learning and get on trust, trust the student to regulate his own intake. Just as we try to get the building out of the way, get the teacher out of the way. In many instances the teacher is an intrusion between the kid and the access he wants to what he wants to know, which means then, as this library is growing, this library-like space is growing, because more and more kids are regulating their intake, with instinct, with their natural thirst that Einstein said all young children have until it is beaten out of them by education."

The proceedings of the workshop are quickly printed for distribution to those who could not attend but who are interested in the proceedings. School Planning believes that one of the fundamental attributes of the workshop is its timeliness. To avoid the long delay in preparing the papers for publication, the meetings are recorded on magnetic tape and then transcribed. Each participant is asked for a copy of his speech notes in a literary form at the time of the meetings.

Research publications

After thorough study, information gathered by the office of School Planning and Building Research is reflected in the specialized publications it produces.

Since the inception of School Planning, 27 publications have been produced including:

Library Resource Centres for Elementary Schools (1966)
Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology - Movement and
Growth Patterns (1969)
Relocatable Learning Facilities (1970)

All of these publications and the expertise of the staff are available to any interested parties, not only in Ontario but throughout the world.