



**Queensland University of Technology**  
Brisbane Australia

This may be the author's version of a work that was submitted/accepted for publication in the following source:

[Lawson, Gillian](#)

(2005)

Development and Innovation in Curriculum Design in Landscape Planning: Students as Agents of Change.

In Academic Committee (Ed.) *Proceedings of the 1st International Landscape Studies Education Symposium*.

Tongji University, PR China, PR China, Shanghai, pp. 447-452.

This file was downloaded from: <https://eprints.qut.edu.au/3306/>

**© Copyright 2005 (please consult author)**

This work is covered by copyright. Unless the document is being made available under a Creative Commons Licence, you must assume that re-use is limited to personal use and that permission from the copyright owner must be obtained for all other uses. If the document is available under a Creative Commons License (or other specified license) then refer to the Licence for details of permitted re-use. It is a condition of access that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights. If you believe that this work infringes copyright please provide details by email to [qut.copyright@qut.edu.au](mailto:qut.copyright@qut.edu.au)

**Notice:** *Please note that this document may not be the Version of Record (i.e. published version) of the work. Author manuscript versions (as Submitted for peer review or as Accepted for publication after peer review) can be identified by an absence of publisher branding and/or typeset appearance. If there is any doubt, please refer to the published source.*

# Development and Innovation in Curriculum Design in Landscape Planning: Students as Agents of Change

Gill Lawson<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, 4001, Australia

**Abstract:** Landscape educators are being asked to address the needs and aspirations of a wide diversity of students in increasing class sizes in Australian universities. A method to identify the philosophical positions of landscape architecture students in landscape planning may offer educators some insight into alternative learning experiences appropriate for different types of students in large classes. We draw on the rhetorical approach of Kenneth Burke to describe the pedagogic discourses of students' drawings in landscape planning as a way of exploring the dominant perspectives within a class. This work forms part of a doctoral study undertaken to document practices and orientations of students in relation to landscape planning prior to their transition into the workplace. Visual representations of 'landscape planning' in drawings and text formed the basis of a typology of five philosophical positions used in identifying how this subject should be considered by the reader. The findings suggest that many students took two dominant philosophical positions when confronted with the complex work of landscape planning. Some students shifted their position during the semester and it is argued that emerging practitioners may hold a range of positions in relation to landscape planning over a period of time.

**Key words:** curriculum development, landscape planning, rhetorical criticism

## 1 Introduction

Landscape architecture is a field of professional education facing an uncertain future. While it aims to fulfill its economic and social responsibilities within Australian society, it is also part of the higher education reform process driven by the global market in educational services. It provides some insight into the changing nature of curriculum design in response to producing work-ready graduates in addition to informed citizens and life long learners. Landscape planning is a sub-discipline of landscape architecture and offers an opportunity to investigate how students respond to new innovations in learning and teaching in this area of study.

The process of curriculum development in landscape planning has focused on four areas: (a) student-centred approaches to learning, rather than teacher-centred approaches; (b) an issues-based focus in the content, rather than a traditional site-based focus; (c) competence-based assessment, rather than performance-based assessment; and (d) trans-disciplinary understanding of concepts, rather than a singular disciplinary understanding. These changes in learning and teaching based on the work of Bernstein (2000) have challenged students in landscape planning in relation to achieving their own personal learning goals. Some students expressed frustration or difficulties with understanding the nature of this field of work, although they often found it difficult to explain their specific problems. Thus this study investigates students' "positions" in relation to their understanding of the concept of 'landscape planning'.

The purpose of this study is specifically to explore the rhetorical language of students' drawings as a way of revealing their philosophical positions or ideologies in relation to learning in the context of landscape planning. Their choices in persuading their teacher about what is important will be analysed using rhetorical criticism, in particular using Burke's pentad (act, agent, agency, scene, purpose) (Burke, 1945). The pentad provides a framework for categorising students' drawings into five philosophical positions: pragmatism, realism, idealism, materialism and mysticism. Whether students shift or do not shift their position allows the teacher to gain some insight into the potential diversity of learning needs within a class. Learning to deal with student diversity continues to be a significant challenge as higher education reforms and economic realities in Australian universities lead to larger classes for teachers in landscape architecture. It is important to briefly outline the context of this study in order to understand the genesis of this work.

## 2 Background to the Study

It is ironic that as the Central Committee of the Communist Party aimed to reduce excessive government control over universities in PR China under the 1985 reforms (Hare & Thomas, 2002), the Australian Government began to move towards increased national control of universities under the 1988 reforms in higher education. The cycle of life in our thirty-eight (38) public universities continues to ebb and flow from a binary system of universities and colleges in 1964 to a tiered system of sandstone, technology and regional universities in 1981, and back to proposed teaching universities and research universities in 2007. For students, there has

been a switch from fee-paying access to universities for the so-called elite, to fully government-funded places for the so-called masses, and back to student contribution and full-fee paying structures now set by both the Australian Government and the universities themselves. Australian Government funding is now only approximately 40% of total revenue and is linked to strict accountability and quality assurance measures (O'Keefe, 2005). Our universities have become dependent on external funding from borrowings, international student enrolments, financial & property investments, consultancies and contract research (O'Keefe, 2005). Like PR China, new Australian curricula and teaching methods have become aligned with national economic and social priorities (Hare & Thomas, 2002). The focus of university education, we are told, in the new global market economy is to be the development of marketable skills and social attributes of graduates for employers.

Landscape architectural education is at a crossroads. It is considered a field of professional education that produces both *graduates* for Australian workplaces (based on technical and vocational education goals) and *citizens* in the broader Australian society (based on liberal education goals). This duality of purpose can, at times, cause some friction between employer and academic interests in charting the direction of course development processes. Landscape architecture is also a small *singular discipline* (arguably based on specific ecological, social & aesthetic values) while, at the same time, it is contributing to a much larger *trans-disciplinary* planning-design effort (at the interface of different sets of values) in our cities and regions. This offers further challenges for curriculum designers as to whether to pursue discipline-based knowledge or integrative planning-design knowledge. Furthermore, strategies for student assessment may also have to be reassessed. They may be *competence-based*, where student diversity is welcomed in the actualisation of a common group goal, or *performance-based*, where student diversity is used to stratify the group according to specialisation of skills and knowledge (Bernstein, 2000) p.44-50). As an applied design profession, landscape architecture faces considerable pressures to implement a third strategy, *generic-based* 'competencies' where the performance of a skill, task, practice or area of work is standardised (Bernstein, 2000). The concern here is the homogenisation of the cultural basis of a liberal education and the technical craft traditions within the profession.

Within landscape architecture, the sub-discipline of landscape planning is considered here to be a microcosm of curriculum reform. It concentrates on global sustainability issues, rather than local site issues, that are driving educational reform in an international context. It deals with population migration from rural to urban areas, environmental degradation of natural resources, pressure on infrastructure provision and social equity in sharing the prosperity from booming economies, common in both Australia and PR China. Its paramount aim is to address not one single issue at one planning level, but the landscape as a whole at many levels. To do this, we are attempting to improve the scholarship of integration within our landscape planning curriculum. We are taking a student-centred approach (lectures & discussions with practitioners, practical experiences as 'discoveries' in the field, workshops and lab sessions, independent interpretations of policies, practices and future scenarios), not a teacher-centred approach (lectures and discussions with teacher only as expert, practical experiences as instructed and independent work according to criteria and standards). We believe that a diversity of learning experiences for students enhances 'client' [read student] satisfaction, improves their graduate capabilities for their employers and achieves our life long learning objectives in this field of work.

Despite many quality improvements, we as teachers are still perplexed by the frustrations experienced by students in this field of study. This study investigates student "positions" in relation to their understanding of the concept of 'landscape planning'. It uses as its foundation the theory of new rhetoric, or the ancient art of persuasion, being used by academics and professionals to communicate different visions of sustainable futures. The rhetorical positions of landscape planning students are of interest because we are taking a student-centred approach to curriculum development. This work is based on the theory of dramatism, developed by Kenneth Burke, a linguistic academic, in which he proposed that human action in any particular situation depends on our use of symbols or language (Burke, 1945). Rhetoric is used to present a particular view of a situation and our choices of symbols or language reveal clues to our viewpoints or motives for doing what we do in relation to a particular situation. We propose the students' learning context can be presented in much the same way as a play or a drama is presented. We study here the rhetorical language of student images to reveal their viewpoints or motives in relation to landscape planning based on act, agent, agency, scene and purpose. The importance of this is in establishing the diversity of student motives within a particular class in order to better address the learning needs of different groups of students (and their professed difficulties with landscape planning compared to landscape design) in working together as partners in achieving our learning & teaching goals. We look to form a typology of students' philosophical positions in relation to landscape planning (based on a student-centred approach to teaching with a competence-based assessment of students' abilities) to achieve a common goal - a sustainable future landscape.

### 3 Approaches to Studying Student ‘Positions’

Seven universities in Australia offer landscape architecture programmes that are accredited by the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects. At QUT, four study levels are available: a new Bachelor of Design (Landscape Architecture), a Master of Landscape Architecture, a Master of Applied Science (Research) and a Doctor of Philosophy. Landscape planning is a unit in the professional studies year of the Bachelor programme that aims to prepare students for graduating as qualified landscape architects. It is taught in the second semester each year from July to October. This unit comprises of three major components – lectures and discussions with practitioners on broad topics; practicals with practitioners and the teacher in studio-based workshops, lab exercises and fieldwork; and independent studies. These studies have included three ‘texts’ in relation to existing development, conventional development and creative development in the Gold Coast in Queensland. In this study, students were asked to reflect on their understanding of ‘landscape planning’ as a concept at the start and end of the semester through writing and drawing. Their texts and images were analysed using Burke’s pentad (Burke, 1945) to categorise students’ conceptions of landscape planning based on the dominant element communicated to the teacher. Each dominant element of act, agent, agency, scene or purpose corresponded to a particular philosophical position of *realism*, *idealism*, *pragmatism*, *materialism* and *mysticism*, respectively. All images from the classes in 2003 and 2004 were categorised into a typology of student positions.

### 4 Results and their Implications

Students’ positions (n=31) were divided into ‘shifters’ (42%) and ‘non-shifters’ (58%). The ‘shifters’ changed their position between the start and the end of the semester of landscape planning. The ‘non-shifters’ remained within the same position between July and October. This is not to say that positions were not changed at all during the semester but that on the recording dates, students expressed positions that were either the same or different to their previous position. ‘Non-shifter’ students in 2003 and 2004 took two (2) major philosophical positions according to the rhetoric of their drawings – *pragmatism* and *realism*. ‘Shifters’, on the other hand, predominantly moved between these two positions and a third position – *mysticism*. Examples of students’ drawings categorised in these three positions are shown in Figure 1.

The analysis suggested that where *agency* (pragmatism) was the dominant element in the drawings, the students’ aimed to persuade their audience that:

- understanding ‘landscape planning’ should be considered as a process, a journey or procedure;
- knowing the constituent steps towards an outcome or end point is very significant here; and
- this knowledge can be described as ‘things to be done’.

Where the *act* (realism) was dominant, the students aimed to convince the teacher that:

- understanding ‘landscape planning’ is dependent on seeing it as a conceptual entity;
- knowing its constituent parts or what part it plays in a larger whole is the most important aspect; and
- this knowledge can be described in a stable, timeless and de-contextualised way.

Where the *purpose* (mysticism) was dominant, the analysis suggests that:

- understanding ‘landscape planning’ is part of an ongoing reflective process of self-discovery;
- what is important is capturing the essence of the concept for further contemplation; and
- this can be done through producing any artefact that promotes other ideas.

The findings imply that the majority of ‘shifters’ and ‘non-shifters’ attempted to persuade their teacher that the most appropriate position in this learning context was a pragmatic viewpoint – that the value of landscape planning lies in its observable consequences – and a realist viewpoint – that the reality of landscape planning lies in its universal principle(s). Of interest to us is that by the end of the semester, a number of ‘shifters’ adopted a third position, mysticism – that landscape planning is part of the unity of purpose of self-discovery.

### 5 Discussion and Conclusion

A consistent philosophical position or ideology may suggest some reluctance by ‘non-shifters’ to move beyond a particular perspective and deal with a greater level of complexity from that stance. It may predispose some students to remain within their ‘comfort zone’ and operate from a singular disciplinary perspective. A shift in philosophical position or ideology, on the other hand, may suggest the willingness by ‘shifters’ to operate from various viewpoints and integrate further knowledge. It may predispose some groups of students in a class to construct their own new pedagogic discourse from other perspectives (Bernstein, 2000). It might be said that

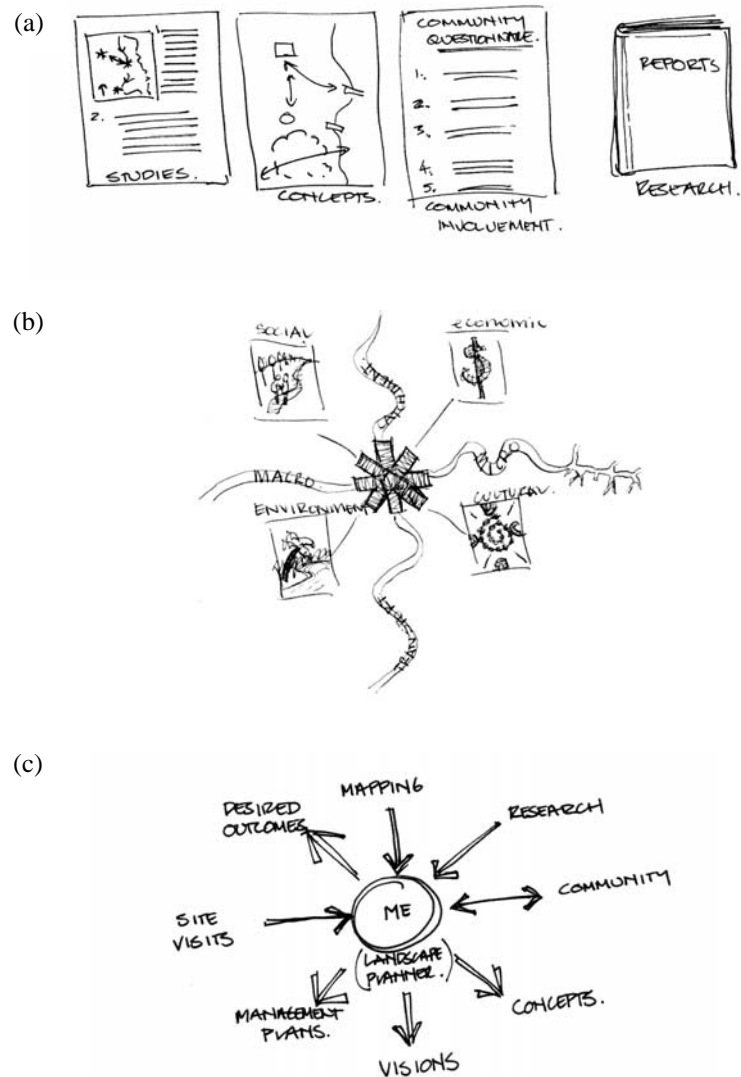


Fig 1: Examples of students' drawings in which (a) agency (b) act and (c) purpose were the dominant elements.

this integrative understanding characterises the world of the experienced landscape architect and design-planning professional in general.

The two major positions revealed in this study corresponding to agency and act as the dominant elements were *pragmatism* and *realism*. We argue that these ideologies are consistent with emerging practitioners who are transitioning from university to the workplace. For students who understand landscape planning as an area of study that will enable them to satisfactorily operate in the world of work, then a position in which the value of that work is understood to rest with its observable consequences is highly consistent with the experience of a junior employee. For students who understand landscape planning as a field of endeavour that may be applied in multiple contexts, perhaps locally and globally, then a position in which the reality of the concept depends on its universal principle(s) is highly consistent with an individual engaging with a shared community goal such as sustainability and wanting to apply it to their work. A third position revealed by our students that corresponded to purpose as the dominant element was *mysticism*. We argue that this ideology of self-discovery is consistent with individuals experiencing a period of personal growth during their academic experience at university,

independent of their job prospects. All three positions are valuable achievements for students in landscape planning as they prepare to move from university into many spheres of endeavour within Australian society.

This diversity within two cohorts also suggests the need for some reassessment of students themselves as active voices in curriculum development through their choices and motives for learning at university. These adult learners are integrating multiple discourses from work, university, family, community and the state into developing a future sustainable landscape. When faced with the complexity of all these discourses operating together in the study of landscape planning, it is perhaps not surprising that students express some frustration and professed difficulties with this field of work. These expressions often have fear as an underlying motive. There may also be some inconsistencies between the students' positions in undertaking the work and the teacher's position in designing and assessing this work. This warrants further investigation. The students' achievements, however, in landscape planning remain highly consistent with the educational goals of work-ready graduates, informed citizens and life long learners. For this reason we argue that landscape planning has significant potential as a transformative curriculum within the integrative discipline of landscape architecture that forms part of a greater trans-disciplinary effort in sustainable development in Australia.

The study aimed to investigate the rhetorical language of student drawings in order to reveal particular philosophical positions in relation to landscape planning, a sub-discipline within landscape architecture. It contextualised this work in relation to the higher education reforms in Australia and China introduced in the 1980s. We have argued that despite the efforts of teachers, practitioners and institutions to steer students towards professional economic and social goals, students themselves are active agents in making choices in relation to the curriculum in landscape planning depending on their own particular motives and ideologies. We acknowledge that a student-centred approach to learning, dealing with global sustainability issues and a competence-based assessment of students' abilities is perhaps new for some students. They may be more familiar with teacher-centred learning, local site issues and performance-based assessment in landscape design. However, we suggest that at least some of these students 'shifted' their position over the course of their experience in landscape planning. This implies some form of transformation may be taking place here. Otherwise, we are convinced that the curriculum has facilitated at least some diversity in students' philosophical positions in this subject. Our next challenge will be to diversify the students' assessment process and allow greater choice for independent study to better address the needs of students with various ideologies and motives.

### **Acknowledgments**

The author wishes to thank her students for kindly allowing their work to be analysed and discussed and her supervisors, Associate Professor Jill Franz and Dr Barbara Adkins, for their valuable support of this work.

### **References**

- [1] Bernstein B. *Pedagogy, Symbolic Control and Identity: Theory, Research and Critique*. Maryland: ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD PUBLISHERS, 2000.
- [2] Burke K. A. *Grammar of Motives*. Berkeley: UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS, 1945.
- [3] Hare P. & Thomas H. Reforms in Chinese Higher Education and their Effect on Teacher Education in Inner Mongolia. *Compare*, 2002, 32(2): 193-203.
- [4] O'Keefe B. Portfolio earnings counter grant cuts. *The Australian newspaper*, 2005, 31 August: 21-22.