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Reflections on the Vanishing Pool

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A Re-examination of the Learn-to-Swim Experience

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A written component completed in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Design at Massey University, College of Creative Arts, Wellington, New Zealand.

Abstract

This Master of Design study develops a mobile learn-to-swim facility for use in New Zealand primary schools. The design seeks to address both the physiological and psychological needs of young children who are learning to swim while promoting children's confidence and excitement throughout their interaction and experience of the space.

As a personal response to the issues of declining access to learn-to-swim pools for New Zealand School children, I examine and analyse traditional and contemporary pools.

An iterative process of design exploration developed an overall design solution. Further focused design addressed the user-experience of entering the pool.

The design maximises the engagement of children with the learn-to-swim process by addressing a number of the stress factors associated with the swimming pool environment. A criteria set is developed for a learn-to-swim pool that is effective in terms of provision of learn-to-swim education, and affective in terms of generating positive emotional response from its users. This design-led research project suggests a pool space that is responsive to a range of users' swimming abilities, learning styles and emotional confidence.

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My love and thanks to my wonderful family.

This thesis is dedicated to my wife Lara for all your love and support, and to my sister Anna for teaching me to swim.

Limitations of the Study

This research project is limited by the exclusion of input from the end users; children learning to swim. The process of involving child participants in the research project proved impractical. This project has drawn data, information and analysis from contemporary literature on the subject and first-hand experience of NZ learn-to-swim pools as the basis for the design proposal.

The design of the learners' pool does not incorporate considered access for users with disabilities. This subject is of great importance to designing for the needs of all end users and is also an issue of personal interest. The time constraints of this study did not allow me to thoroughly explore the requirements. Rather than give perfunctory consideration to the needs of users with disabilities, and suggest they were properly catered for, the final design should not be considered complete without significant further design research in this area.

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