



Bundesrealgymnasium (secondary school) Traun, Upper Austria, 1971 – 74, design by architects Müller + Eisenmenger

From 'Intensive-Teacher-Farming' to Human Workplace

By Michael Zinner, Architect and Teacher at University (Linz) and School (Traun)
(photos and drawings by Michael Zinner)

One aspect in the vast field of school and space is the spatial situation of **teachers at work**. Beside the pedagogy and the reorganization of teaching space the places where teachers are dealing with their 'own' working places are mainly not in the center of discussion. In Austria we are starting to have a difficult discussion about that, since we will change our secondary school system from mainly teaching in the morning time to teaching and afternoon care. For this the 'physical hardware' of schools has to be reconsidered and adapted.

The spatial concept in schools in Austria usually is a system of '**separation**', which means: on the one hand we have the classrooms which are mainly referring to the class (e.g. the '7A' in a secondary school). Teachers are 'visiting' the classroom for their teaching, lesson by lesson. Pupils are leaving the classroom only for special subjects like Physics, Chemistry (labs) or Arts (studios). Pupils identify with their 'own' classroom.

On the other hand we have the explicit working space for teachers, which is a group of rooms within the rooms of the entire administration: there are a wardrobe, bathrooms, space for breaks/recreation with a small kitchen and finally the room, where each teacher gets his/her working-place. This is all extremely **standardized**. For instance, the federal state of Austria allows one teacher a desk of 60 by 60 cm (2 by 2 feet) and a storage space of 3 shelves 40 by 60 cm (1.3 by 2 feet), one of them lockable.



Take a look at the old scenario: in the sea of crowded desks a couch is drowning and the kitchen is a drive-through feature glueing on the wall ...

DESK + KITCHEN

The situation in the secondary school (BRG) in Traun, near Linz in Upper Austria, built from 1971 to 1974 is like in many schools: teachers 'work' in a chaotic space, which has got a lot of inconvenient edges and scenarios by self-made modification. Sometimes it reminds one of intensive livestock farming ... I call it the **traditional idea of 2 scenarios** (kitchen and desk), which is not coping with the teachers **needs**:

- 1 A place to have a break, a chat, to get informal information, to have eye contact with others and the feeling of being in the centre, but also with the one opposite of you with whom you have a coffee.
- 2 Then a central infrastructural hotspot with copy-machine, internet, printers, cutter, paper and so on.
- 3 A central information board, a black board, a shelf with a personal post-box.
- 4 A personal lockable cupboard, which is definitely their own. This is the place, where the teaching aids belong. This is also a place for quick come and go (e.g. in the 5-minutes breaks).
- 5 A place for the personal laptop, a docking station, for short-time working.
- 6 A place for silence, for recreation, for concentration, for long-time working, for thinking, for dreaming.

In the BRG Traun the rooms of the administration have been **rebuilt in this summer** (2010) with a very small budget. I – as a member of the teaching staff – got the chance to implement my ideas into to plans of the local architect. Thus we could create an advanced **design of 3 scenarios** (instead of two). Considering the special spatial needs we do have now:



Viewing teachers spaces: 3 glass-skins a separating and connecting standby-room (foreground) – chatroom (middle)– studio (background).

STANDBY + CHAT + STUDIO

- A** The standby-room covers point 4 and 5. It is a very dense situation, **no romanticism**, storage, docking station. But still there are possibilities for quick discussions/agreements, since the teachers desks are organized in 6 groups of 6 to 16 people. And they enjoy two experiences of space: while sitting short horizon (only desk and neighbour), while standing wide horizon (whole room and more).
- B** The chat-room covers point 1, 2 and 3. It is in the middle of all other rooms providing visual connection to all other parts of the administration. At the same time it is a hidden part of circulation since it is **connecting** the head of administration, the secretary, the standby-room, the wardrobe with the bathrooms and the studio. When you are in the chat-room you can't miss important information ...
- C** The studio is the real benefit. Teachers have this new possibility: to **enjoy silence** (which now turns out to be more important than anything else)! We already do realize more harmony among all teachers in the first weeks of usage. This room also helps to unburden the standby-room and relieves some of the traffic jams in rush hours (morning, midday).



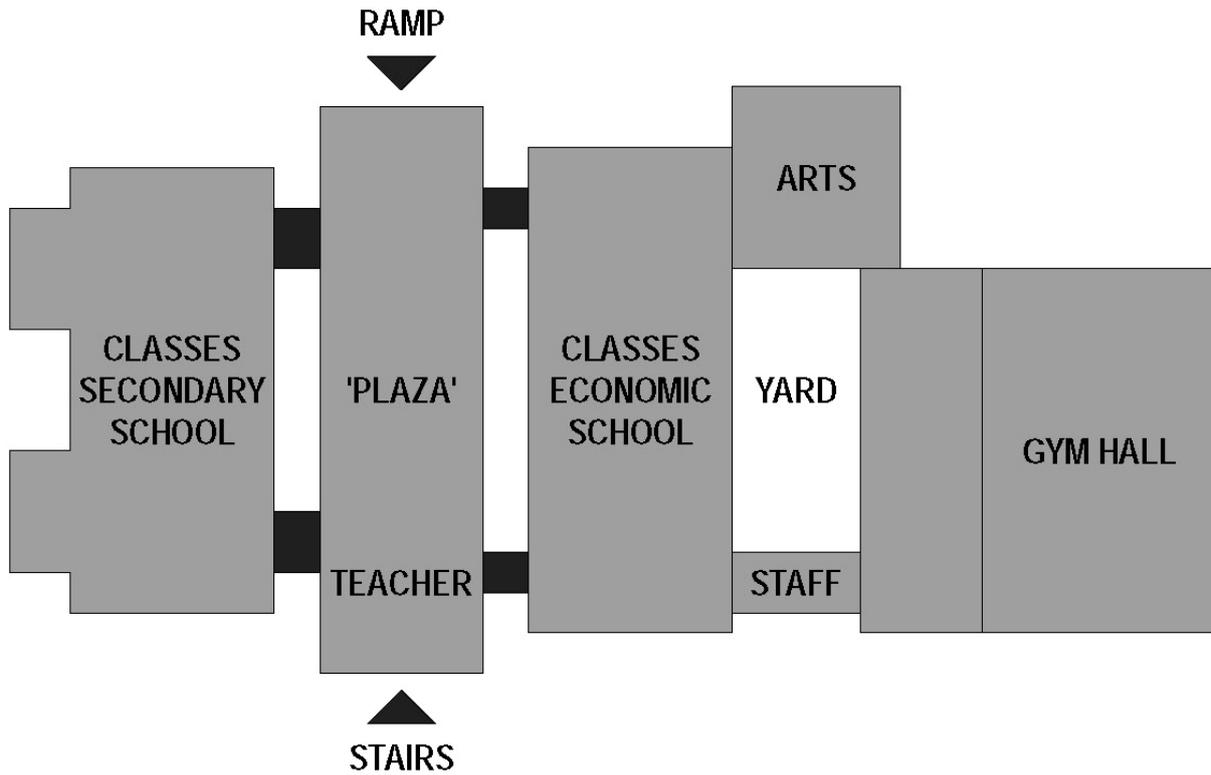
The new standby-room (not finished). Very dense, less space, but still spatial possibilities to communicate within 5 minutes!

CONCLUSION

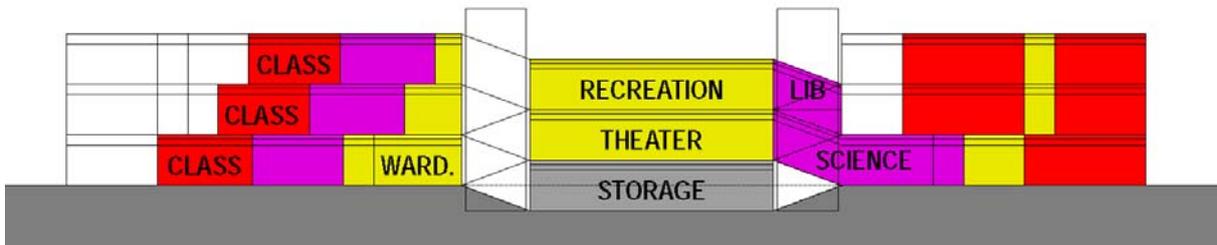
The idea of density for docking station and wide horizon for common areas is not new. Especially big **companies** tend to implement those ideas, because they create a win-win-situation: e.g. an insurance company can save a lot of money by providing more common cozy and attractive space for everybody and fewer desks than employees (only some 60%) since – by statistics – there are never all employees in the building at the same time.

This is **similar** to the situation within the teacher's areas in school: the teachers are never all in! Thus the idea of standby room could be even more radical! In this case I was happy to make the first step. Every teacher still does have his/her own desk. But it is simply not necessary!

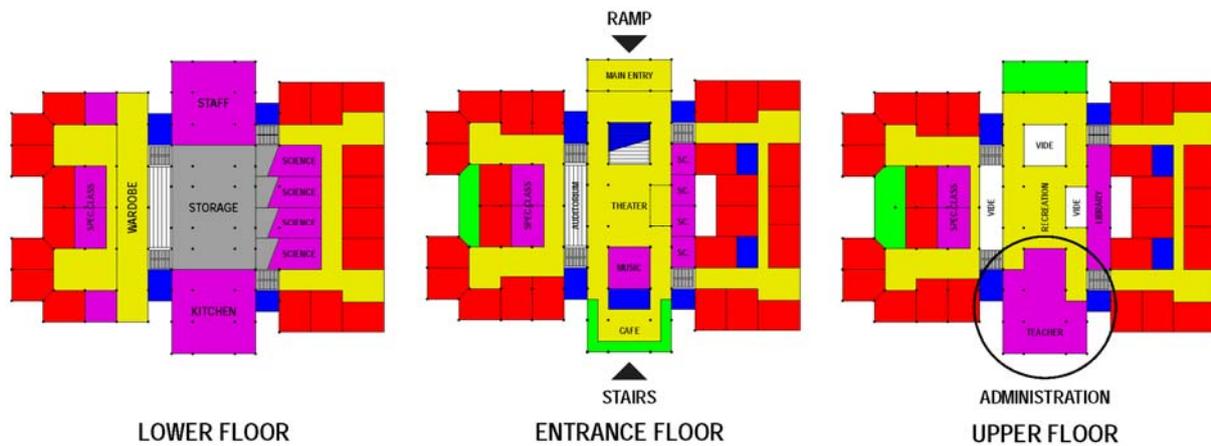
It is a small change and still not finished, as you can see in the pictures (sorry for that). We can also call it an **acupuncture treatment** within the school in Traun, no 'great architecture' for fancy newspapers. But it will turn out as a key investment. Of course we will mainly have to change our teaching system. At the same time we have to take care of our teachers, because only healthy and happy ones can do a good job for our students – and they are our future ...



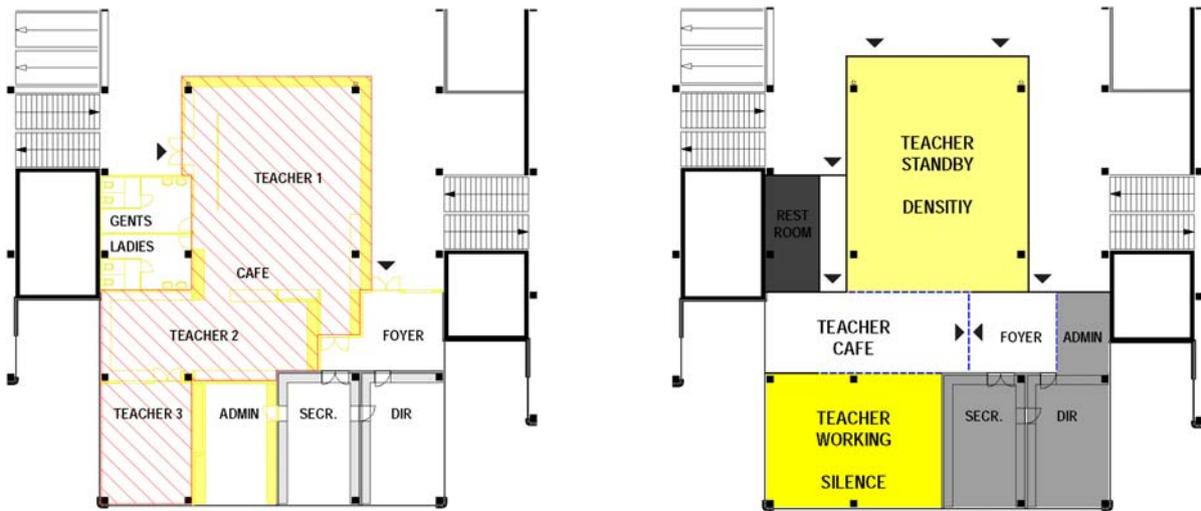
The school in Traun is a good example for a (Hallenschule) built as a solitary block. It is a complex of two institutions sharing the gym.



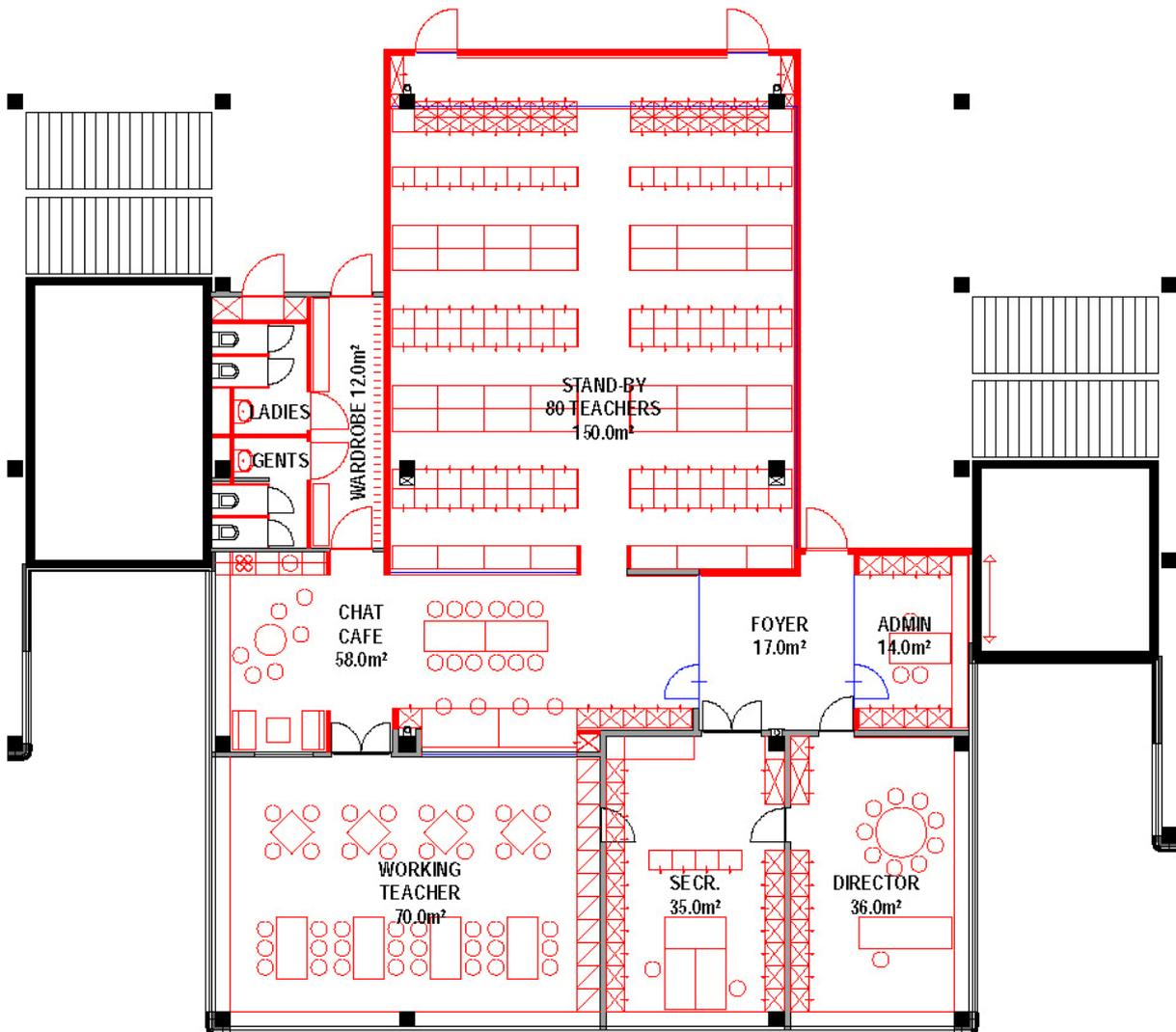
In the section you see the spatial qualities and potentials of the split-level centre for recreation and theatre.



Floor plans show potential for group-building of 4 to 6 classrooms (left part of building). In the upper floor plan you see the location of administration.



On the left: the old chaotic figure – and on the right you see the new idea of 3 scenarios.



The new design also shows a gentle separation of external and internal circulation.