



UTO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: L-SHAPED WALLS OPENED TO THE GREENERIES

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This project is the reconstruction of Uto Elementary School, a relatively large school of about 800 students. The building requires 24 classrooms, four special needs rooms, seven multipurpose rooms, a gymnasium, and several administrative offices.



Rather than over-determining the organization of the school, we aspired to design an accommodating and liberating space amongst the trees in a forest to nurture a healthy environment.

Louis Kahn famously said, "School began with a man under the tree, who did not know he was a



teacher, discussing his realization with a few who did not know they were students." In our project, we thought of this tree as the L-shaped wall. Each classroom would be structured by the placement of these walls, which would be distributed as 'arbitrarily' as possible while achieving the necessary spaces of the school.



Moreover, these L-shaped walls could be introduced, without major disruption, into the natural and self-regulating environment of an existing forest. Being able to support flat slabs for ceilings, the grouping of L-shaped walls could establish complex boundaries, forming a number of inner gardens within a contained environment.

At the threshold with the exterior, the open sides of the walls have full-height folding doors that only



need to be closed in the winter.



In reality, once the L-shaped walls are fully distributed on the site, the density is quite high.

We therefore examined how individual classes could limit their acoustic or visual distractions, while remaining connected to the main circulation routes, along with providing specific places to store the ever-increasing possessions of children, and ensuring constant cross-ventilation, as there are no air conditioning units. We sought the appropriate positioning of the L-shaped walls, talking into account the sequence of movement much in the way chess pieces move around the chessboard. To increase design precision, we also reduced the module of the datum on the field from 2750 mm to 1375 mm.

The seamless appearance of trees and walls makes possible the school's wide variety of activities. The continuity dissolves the architecture, as if to state that the space was not willfully 'designed.' If there is an educational environment with the potential to host the pedagogical ideas being tested in Japan today – from the concept of "open education" to the small, "team teaching" classes – we believe this model is capable of responding positively to the anticipated changes.



