

LEARNING SPACES

E-Presentation Transcript

Welcome to Creating Spaces to Inspire Learning. Investigating how spaces influence our students.

WHY LEARNING SPACES MATTER

Teachers and students are becoming more involved in the design of spaces for learning, and rightly so.

"Twenty-first century learning theories emphasise the importance of supporting authentic and ubiquitous (*anywhere, anyhow*) learning, and providing students with opportunities, resources and spaces to develop their creative and critical thinking skills" (Newton and Fisher 2009; McGuinness 1999, 2010, as cited in the Australian Curriculum-Critical and Creative Thinking-Background, 2015).

As we make advances in the field of education, we're guided by the Australian Curriculum and are informed by international and alternative curriculums. It is apparent that spaces for learning must also adapt and evolve to support the most appropriate pedagogical practices to achieve our overall, holistic, educational goal of assisting "students to live and work successfully in the twenty-first century" (2015).

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THE CLASSROOM AND THE SCHOOL

As an educator, what do we want our classrooms to provide for ourselves and our students? Long gone are the days where teachers are limited to the front of the room to inform—students seated in strict rows. Instead, 21st century classrooms should be physically and aesthetically designed to support and promote transformative learning experiences.

Ideally, it should create a sense of belonging. It should enhance students' individual learning styles and promote participation, engagement, and interaction. Our classrooms should encourage creativity, flexibility, innovation and imagination and allow learners time and space to reflect on their experiences and to collaborate with and contribute to the learning experiences of others.

Today's pedagogical practices have evolved from the disciplinary-dominated styles seen throughout the 1800's and 1900's (Schatzenstaller, 2010, p. 23), and educators are recognising the value of teaching methodologies such as the Aboriginal 8 Ways (8 Ways, 2015). Yet, unfortunately, our classroom learning spaces have often remained stagnant.

So, how do we change this? Firstly, Read has stated "the children's perspective on the designed classroom is often overlooked in the design-decision making process" (Read, 2010, p. 76).

Classrooms should have a balance of open and enclosed learning spaces, a mixture of low-stimuli and high-stimuli areas, and include the use of colours, textures, circular and spherical design elements and natural light (Read, 2010, p. 79).

Bland observed the inclusion of the natural environment (Bland, 2011, p. 12), either by including it inside or by experiencing learning outdoors.

Classroom design should encourage the facilitation of co-operative and collaborative learning practices as ". . . the expectation that children will learn passively is becoming unrealistic". (Slavin, 2010, p. 173).

We cannot expect today's students to develop the skills, knowledge, and behaviours necessary to work in an unknown future by educating them in a classroom and school environment which doesn't support this.

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BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

Often, the element that learning beyond the classroom and school delivers is that of a united learning community.

A well-planned and well-timed incursion or excursion offers an opportunity to broaden both understanding of a topic as well as understanding of the world beyond the school gates.

As stated in the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, we are educating our students "to become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens". (Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, 2008). To achieve this, we must be ensuring that we're exposing our students to life beyond the classroom as well as equipping them with the behaviours and skills to work within a shared community.

One way is by creating Community of Practice (CoP) opportunities where members with a common cause or goal come together and collaborate to share ideas, knowledge, experience, and feedback in an effort to enhance and improve our learning (Smith, 2009, n.p.).

We can include members from our school, local community, wider Australian community, and international community through avenues such as incursions, excursions, class visits, Skype or FaceTime chats, emails/social media interactions, and so on.

This provides opportunities for students to develop powerful, enriching and meaningful learning experiences and skills that will assist our students to meet the Melbourne Declaration's goal.

Learning beyond the classroom has much more to offer than the thrill of a bus ride and the day out of the school.

As educators, we should be aiming to spark that level of enthusiasm, engagement, and participation that incursions and excursions produce by incorporating these experiences into our regular learning practices. By creating genuine CoP opportunities into our teaching programs across the curriculum, we can benefit by creating enriched learning experiences even whilst within our classroom's walls.

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ELECTRONIC LEARNING SPACE

Perhaps one of the biggest faults today of the electronic learning space is "too often it's about new mediums being simply used to deliver in old ways". (Dixon, 2011. p. 4). Many classrooms have iPad or computer programs, but are they being used in ways that extend and enrich learning?

To our detriment, too much focus has been on "delivery technologies that were simply transplanting traditional pedagogy through technology" (Dixon, 2011, p. 4).

As demonstrated, the electronic or technological learning space can allow opportunities to enhance traditional learning spaces in ways that would otherwise be impossible.

However, much of the use, success and relevance of this space comes down to the courage of the class teacher. Many educators assume that to introduce technology means they have to be experts, or at the very least, capable users. However, by allowing our students the freedom and support to investigate with technology following guided questions or tasks, it becomes apparent that learning can emerge naturally.

As with most things, balance is key. Students must have the opportunity and support to be exposed in safe, challenging, and relevant ways. As the Australian Curriculum (2015) states, the electronic learning space allows students to solve problems by "creating innovative solutions, independently and collaboratively, that meet current and future needs".

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INDIVIDUAL LEARNING SPACES

What type of learners are your students? And, more importantly, once you've asked and reflected on that question, are you supporting and developing their learning styles?

Do they need quiet? Do they need activity? Do they need movement? Do they learn by seeing it? Hearing it? Doing it? Or a combination of these?

Furthermore, do you know what motivates them to learn? Are they self-directed learners with a high level of personal drive, initiative, and confidence? Do they require clearly defined goals and a high-degree of teacher-evaluation of their progress in order to move forward? Are you, as their teacher, providing a range of methods to deliver information to them, such as books, electronics, multimedia? Do you know what value the learning has for your students?

In most classrooms, students will range from being teacher-directed to student-directed in their learning styles, and often this can depend on the situation and what's being learnt.

Do you encourage students to reflect on their own learning experiences? Do you ask them to investigate what they have done, why it was important, allow them to apply their learning and identify connections (Pappas, 2011, n.p.)? Are they invited to evaluate their own learning and use this information to create new patterns, structures, plans, or designs?

Individual learning spaces involves much more than teachers assuming that the old bean bag in the book corner means that everyone in their class is being catered for. It should include a holistic approach to each students' learning behaviours, preferences, and tendencies and support one another in the process of learning together.

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GROUP LEARNING SPACES

The mere mention of “group work” can sometimes be enough to make a teacher cringe as too often it represents haphazard outcomes, at best.

However, collaborative and cooperative group work offer enhanced learning opportunities. Collaborative group work allows learners of varying abilities and personality types to explore units of work and share their thoughts and insights as they work together towards a common goal. When collaboration is working well it can lead to a deeper understanding of content, increased overall achievement in grades, improved self-esteem, and higher motivation to remain on task (Concept to Classroom, 2004, n.p.).

Cooperative group work is perhaps the most beneficial type of group learning. Students work together in a small groups, specifically selected by the teacher, towards a common goal. In order to achieve this goal, each individual is accountable for their own work, and the success of the group is assessed as a whole.

In many instances, students contribute to their teams by improving over their own past performances (Slavin, 2010, p. 163).

When the task of the group is to make sure that everyone learns something, a much higher and genuine investment is given to ensuring that one's teammates understand as well. And the research shows that high achievers gain just as much from cooperative learning as low and average-achievers (Slavin, 1995, cited in p. 171).

Overall, in order for group work to work, two things must be present - group goals and individual accountability. Well-designed group work opportunities need to play a role in 21st century education.

By ensuring you incorporate group goals and individual accountability, group learning spaces can provide students with a method to "master traditional skills and knowledge as well as develop the creative and interactive skills needed in today's economy and society" (Slavin, 2010, p. 173).

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