



The Evolving Classroom Experience

Creating the Optimum Learning Environment

INTRODUCTION

Learning environments that are active, cooperative and engaging serve to benefit teachers and students alike. Many current classrooms still fail to utilise their potential. By rethinking the classroom experience, however, educators can maximise learning opportunities.

Balancing budgets and the classroom wish list is an ongoing challenge for every educational facility. Therefore, full scale renovations are not always the answer. This paper aims to provide scope for adapting existing facilities to the new learning environment on a budget.

WHAT MAKES AN OPTIMUM LEARNING ENVIRONMENT?

Naturally, the teacher's personality and approach go a long way to shaping a positive class atmosphere. But shrewd choices about space can also assist in creating an optimum learning environment.

Modern learning spaces are envisioned as places where the learner is engaged in self-directed and co-operative learning activities, and the physical environment is planned so that it can be routinely reorganised to mediate learningⁱ.

By choosing a classroom layout that allows for flexibility and adaptability, teachers can exercise a greater sense of environmental control as well as encouraging student engagement.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

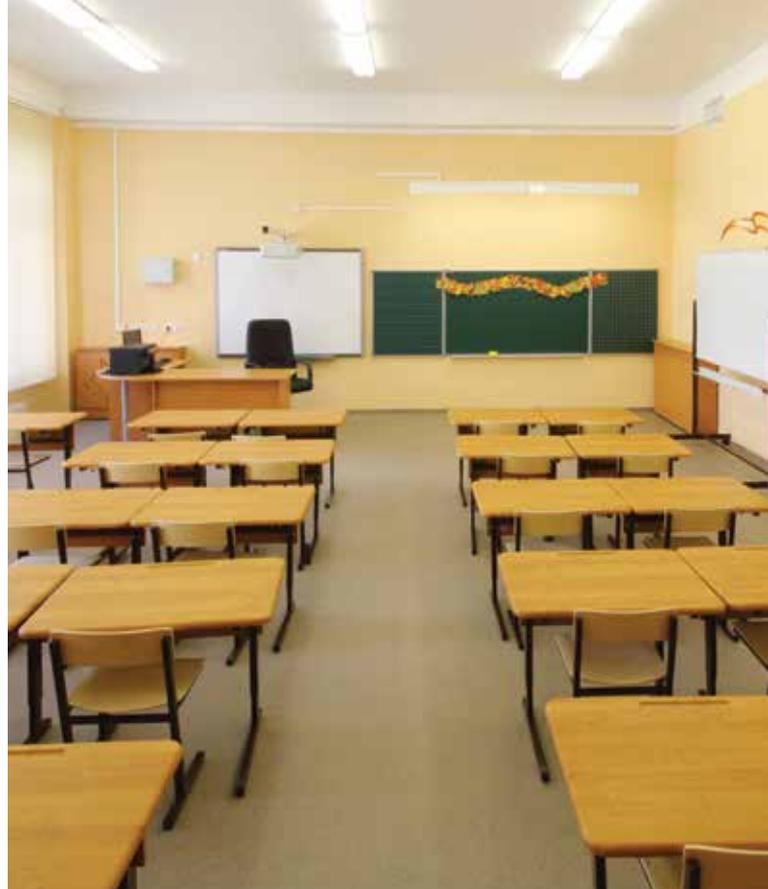
Getting and keeping students engaged is perhaps the most important element of successful learningⁱⁱ. Focus is an integral part of this and a lack of it can adversely affect students of all ages. When distractions are minimised, students are proven to be more receptive and engaged which, in turn, leads to better learning outcomes.

Students can learn to be more autonomous, which is a crucial formative skill. Rather than all sitting down and copying exhaustive notes from the teacher, a dynamic classroom fosters active participation and collaboration.

Supporting this, a study by the National Training Laboratories in the USA found that only around five per cent of information delivered by lecture is retained compared to fifty per cent for discussion groups and seventy per cent for practice by doing. These rates rose even higher when students collaborated and helped teach one anotherⁱⁱⁱ.

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In turn, when learning is more effective and inclusive, it creates a happier school environment with fewer tendencies towards negative behaviour.



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FLEXIBLE DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

The classroom needs to be a dynamic environment for students. If the space becomes stagnant and rigid, it can permeate throughout the mindset of the entire class^{iv}.

When considering that multiple classes will be using the same environment, the obvious challenge is how to adapt that space to the needs of each group and personalities within those groups. Flexibility is the key ingredient in catering to each application.

A more flexible and adaptable classroom also allows space to be tailored specifically to the purpose of each class. For example, sections can be cordoned off for quiet reading, individual research or group discussions.

As well as physical flexibility, budget flexibility is another important consideration. In the face of increasing financial pressures for many educational facilities across the country, doing more with less is a common directive. Full scale building renovation can be both costly and disruptive and often fails to deliver the flexibility required. For these reasons, there is now a distinct move towards sourcing more temporary and adaptable solutions.

FLEXIBLE SOLUTIONS

The physical barrier offered by room dividers, as well as the noise reduction properties, offers seclusion and removes potential distractions that could otherwise derail productivity.

It reflects a continued shift away from stale, rote learning approaches that fail to engage students.

Rather than installing expensive fixed permanent room partition systems, mobile room dividers can offer better flexibility at a fraction of the cost. They can be used for more than just dividing classroom space and can be thought of as mobile teaching resources as well as mobile galleries.

By using pins and tacks on the portable divider surface, you can instantly double your wall space to display information, students' work or create a bulletin board. Additional marker boards and chalkboards can also be added.

One multi-purpose classroom can be transformed into to a dual activity space, a group learning area, break-out space or a one-on-one student and teacher area in a matter of seconds. When finished, the room dividers can then be easily folded down and rolled away for storage.

As Australia's leading manufacturer of mobile room dividers, Portable Partitions Australia are perfectly positioned to assist schools and educational facilities in creating more adaptable and productive learning environments. Cost effective solutions are available in a variety of sizes, colours and finishes. Custom design is also an option if required.

Use of Portable Partitions Australia Wall-Mounted 360 Folding Acoustic Room Divider at Collaroy Plateau Public School in Sydney.



One multi-purpose classroom can be transformed in a matter of seconds for however long it's required.



Use of Portable Partitions Australia 360 Folding Acoustic Room Divider within a local school.

References

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<http://www.hermanmiller.com/research/solution-essays/rethinking-the-classroom.html>
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- iv Top Ten Strategies for Classroom Management and Discipline
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