spaces4learning
Impacting K-12 & Higher-Education Environments

Is the Classroom of Today Obsolete?

Sponsored content by VS AMERICA

01/01/14

I have been told "I can teach in a closet." Honestly, I have no doubt that these instructors can. However, I interject, I can go down a ski slope on a set of skis from 1890.1 will get to the bottom, but wouldn't it be a more enjoyable trip if we had a more effective set of tools that responded to the task at hand — an effective set of tools that respond to individual teaching and learning styles that are being utilized in today's classrooms?

Let's take a look at a commonly referenced benchmark in the history of school design. Nearly 75 years ago, the firm of Perkins & Will, along with Eliel and Eero Saarinen, designed what has been referred to as one of the most significant buildings in history. It has been further called "a landmark of design for education, which demonstrates that an inspired educational philosophy can be translated into an architecture of continuing function and beauty," by the American Institute of Architects. Simply put, the architects, as they were designing, spent a great deal of time in the classroom studying the teachers and the students and learning from their actions.

Cultural Shift was designed in a very similar fashion.
To begin, we needed to start with a blank canvas, do the hard work, roll up our sleeves and get into the classrooms and not only understand the teaching and learning styles that are being utilized but respond to them. We needed to stop checking boxes. We needed to provide a new set of tools.

Our intent was to create background music. We were not interested in the showcase of a product; we were interested in showcasing the variety of learning opportunities and styles. We were not interested in burdening our furniture with accessories; we wanted the end users to bring their accessories in and out of the environments as the lessons and learning transpired.

We understood that we were in the midst of a transitional period. We needed to remember that we were designing school facilities that will be here 50 years. We were aware of the up curve of technology advancements, we interpreted that we are going to need less technologies and more effective people in the future. We were going to need to do more with less.

It had become apparent, a holistic approach to educational facility design needed to respond to technological advancements. The catalyst for this opportunity of a shift in educational design was solely attributed to our need to become untethered. Robust wireless technologies have opened the gate to enable us to do more with less.

We are in the midst of a paradigm shift, a cultural shift in school design.

So what does this look like in three dimensional form? Let's start by providing opportunities to move the technology, storage and shelving systems off and away from wall surfaces and into the instructional areas. Let's provide a multifunctional set of tools that are also adaptable. Let's invest in more mobility and become untethered while adding transparency. Let's reduce the clutter. Let's invest in fun, inviting and engaging environments. The above statements are our design principals which we created and meticulously followed enabling us to stay on task while creating a new set of tools.

This new set of tools is elegant. Cultural Shift can be easily reconfigured to fit a variety of educational styles. The tools do not respond to a specific place, they can be utilized in classrooms, collaboration spaces, media centers from K-12 through Higher Education. Cultural Shift improves space utilization.

Cultural Shift is not about ONE solution. Cultural Shift is about providing a diverse set of tools enabling the end users to create their own unique environments. Cultural Shift responds to multiple teaching and learning styles simultaneously. Cultural Shift frees up the learning environments to be personalized, fulfilling the needs of specific occupants at a precise point in time.
Cultural Shift is about making a difference.

This article originally appeared in the issue of: https://spaces4learning.com/articles/2014/01/01/cultural-shift.aspx