

## Book Review

### **Harrison, A. and Hutton, L. (2014) *Design for the Changing Educational Landscape***

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Which university has an ocean-going dive boat and a water ski boat? Is there really a College of Pizzarology? What happens when school classrooms are placed inside a museum?

This book will answer these questions, and many others which may not yet have occurred to you, and it comes with a warning – you will never look at classrooms, corridors, even picnic benches on campus, in quite the same way. You may perhaps find yourself referring to them as “campfire, watering hole, cave” (p. 62). Read it, and do not wait too long – learning spaces, both physical and virtual, are rapidly changing.

At the outset, the book's stated aim is to encourage stakeholders “to create an events-based rather than space based identity”, pointing the way to “a fully integrated learning landscape: a learning community.” It sheds light on the issue of spaces for learning, arguing that this is an area which has been neglected in the past:

“Learning space has an established tendency to react to changing demands rather than set an agenda...” (p.44)

The book has a logical structure, which consists of three parts, each comprising three chapters. Part one outlines the contemporary context of education in schools, further and higher education, and business and cultural spaces, focusing on drivers for change. Memorable metaphors are used to reinforce the need for transformation, for example the authors cite Higgins et al (2005):

“No one knows how to prevent 'learning loss', when you design a room 'pedagogically', whereas we know lots about designing for minimum heat loss.” (p.44)

Later, the authors cite Schratzenstaller's (2010) reference to the irony of using “educational mills of the 19<sup>th</sup> century” in societies which depend upon innovation and progression (p. 68). A further argument for change relates to the constraining impact of learning spaces on introducing innovative learning and teaching approaches.

By far the longest section, part two provides a fascinating range of international case studies, from “Aalto on Tracks” (one hundred Finnish students learning on a train) to semi-enclosed hybrid learning spaces in Arusha, Tanzania. The focus is primarily physical learning spaces, but the interaction between physical and virtual learning is addressed. The reader is encouraged to view the whole campus (and beyond) as a learning space: corridors should be re-purposed – as “distributed indoor learning spaces” (p.143). The analysis of learning spaces does not stop at the classroom door, nor indeed the “distributed inner learning space” - the entire environment is examined, including libraries, staff rooms, cafes, offices, sports facilities, and linkage to business

and cultural spaces.

In part three, the authors outline models and strategies to redefine the learning landscape. All aspects of learning should be blended into "one seamless experience" (p.230). Communities of learning should be more "generously conceived" (p.246), encompassing all levels of learning, as well as lifelong learning, work-based learning, retirement communities and others. The learning institution should be at the centre of the community and not bounded by place.

If these arguments sound somewhat aspirational, some of the more pragmatic notions may be music to the ears of many practitioners. Planners should withhold "the rush to provide physical accommodation until an entire learning strategy is in place" (p. 247), and the design of teaching and learning spaces should be "informed by pedagogical principles, rather than being estates led." (p.257).

The rousing final paragraphs contend that each learning group should have "its own manifesto and pedagogies, and a view of where that learning can take place" (p.258) – including well beyond the campus. It is argued that the blurring boundaries between learning, working, living and leisure create opportunities to support blended learning in its widest sense, to create true learning centred communities.

This book is likely to appeal to a varied audience. Clearly those whose role is space planning in educational and cultural environments are a key constituency. Nevertheless, the authors propose that all "stakeholders" should contribute to planning learning spaces, hence the potential audience is wider and should certainly encompass lecturers, school teachers, educational managers – indeed, all those who contribute to, or aspire to contribute to, the learning landscape. Furthermore, the extensive sections on community and academic libraries make the book of relevance to librarians.

It may be argued that the book is particularly suited to "dippers" rather than those who like to read cover to cover. The skim reader will find eye-catching case studies, illustrations and models, and would be well advised to focus on chapter 5 for some inspirational examples, and read the thought provoking final chapter in more detail. The conscientious cover-to-cover reader may become a little frustrated, as I did, by the lack of conclusions at the end of each chapter. Moreover, while the excellent summaries of wide ranging research are a useful reference source, the authors' key arguments only emerge in the introduction and conclusion. This may be a personal inclination, but I would have preferred to gain insights into the authors' perspectives and critiques throughout, with a persuasive case gradually built up integrating the research cited, rather than holding my breath until the end. Finally (and no doubt the same criticism could be levelled at my work) in places a more thorough proof read was needed.

On the other hand, the authors demonstrate a truly impressive amount of research using a commendable range of established and contemporary sources, from newspapers to text books, websites and government reports. A diversity of inspiring case studies illuminate national and global practice in schools, universities, business and cultural spaces. There may have been scope to include more case studies from UK "teaching intensive" universities, and additional (or at least some) Further Education examples - which are conspicuous by their absence in the mammoth 82 page chapter 5, "The Further and Higher Education Campus". The size of the book (258 roughly A4 sized pages with text in two columns per page) is daunting at first, but the large pages work well to showcase examples of spaces with colourful photographs and clear diagrams, as well as tables and models.

Overall, the book is successful in challenging existing use of learning space, and proposing new

and innovative models for the future. Once you have read it, you are likely to re-evaluate your lab, classroom, studio – and the library – and the cafe – and the picnic bench - and even your own workspace, asking yourself how these potentially constraining environments be used to promote innovative practice in HE.