

Editorial

Hello!



James Clarke
Editor

All too often, it feels as if the photographs and case studies of learning spaces that are published in magazines and on websites only come from architects and builders of big glossy projects: projects that were completed over a number of years and at a cost of millions. It was once said that one of the problems with “Building Schools for the Future” here in the UK was the use of the word “building” in the title. So we see large atria with expensively-furnished break-out spaces, studios with glass walls and fancy graphics, and landscapes the design of which Capability Brown would be proud. And whilst these projects are interesting and awe-inspiring, what can we take from them – interpret into our own spaces?

So this issue of Learning Spaces looks at simple ideas that have a big impact, and a number of common themes occur. Having students sitting at different heights in learning spaces is something Ben Baxter of The Cooper School in Oxfordshire (see page 51) feels passionately about, as does Greg Miyagana across the Atlantic in the Canadian Province of British Columbia (see page 14). Mandy Parker of Liverpool Community College (see page 34) feels strongly about a good spring clean – something Ben agrees with, and both Professor Stephen Heppell and television’s Max McMurdo saw the enormous benefits of involving students in the design of their learning spaces when they tackled projects in Spain (see page 42) and Bedfordshire (page 06) respectively. We look at how Manalo & White took on an uninspiring industrial building in Slough (page 56), converting it into a stunning learning space and how a simple coat of paint can have a transformative effect on a classroom (page 22). But in all instances, the results belied the investment involved in achieving them.

It’s a real privilege to be involved with Learning Spaces magazine – each and every day seeing how teachers, architects and manufacturers are responding to the – on the face of it – simple concept of providing the very best spaces possible in which to learn. In every other walk of life, we acknowledge the relevance of environment – from shopping to eating out we choose places with character and ambience. As I write this, I’m sitting in an airport departure lounge going out to see a school in Sweden, and I’m surrounded by duty free shops and restaurants with billboards and videos playing in the background. Hundreds of thousands of pounds have been spent by the airport and the businesses that operate in it, to encourage me to relax and stay calm, browse the shops and part with my cash! So if only on a subconscious level, we must accept that different environments affect us in different ways. So, too, should it be with learning spaces – what furniture manufacturer VS calls “The Third Teacher”. Until we do that, I believe we are educating our students effectively with one arm tied behind our backs. It’s surely imperative that we start to accept this, stop thinking classroom design doesn’t matter and instead raise the bar – and if nothing else, this issue proves that even the ever-diminishing budgets schools across the globe have to work with, doesn’t have to be a barrier to providing supportive, inspiring spaces in which to learn. Still sceptical? Then read Greg’s piece first! I hope that you take something from the following pages that in turn has an impact on the learners who inhabit these spaces!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James Clarke'.