

Session 1

SPACES TO LEARN IN: THE CHALLENGE OF LEARNING SPACE DESIGN TO VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

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For many hundreds of years the idea of a classroom has been largely unchanged. Classrooms are recognisable across the centuries in art and literature and in the work of the diarists of the day. A significant shift has occurred in recent years where the concept of “classroom” has been challenged. This has been seen in the compulsory sector in moves to learning commons approaches, in tertiary education in the greater infusion of interactive learning technology and across both in the development of pedagogies that require active, authentic engagement with learning rather than passive receipt of information.

In polytechnics there is an interesting binary where the authentic, active and contextualised learning occurs in “learning spaces” that are not traditional classrooms but designed to bring all the elements of the relevant industry to mind, hence, teaching kitchens, model workshops, laboratories, clinical practicum, teaching practicum and others. However, there are still many learning spaces that are recognisably “classrooms” and the question to be asked is “How can learning spaces best support the learning outcomes of our programmes?” Rather than have the classroom constrict and drive a particular kind of “stand and deliver” approach to teaching it may be time for polytechnics and other tertiary institutions to consider what design features of learning spaces might best support learning for effective workplace participation given the absence of workplaces that require the skill of sitting and listening in a large group and the more common workplace features of team work, problem solving, communication, decision making, global connection and applying a rapidly changing skill set. This paper considers the possibilities of learning space design elements supporting learning outcomes through a visual traverse of a series of projects the author has been engaged in to bring innovation to the design of new “classrooms”. The paper will link learning outcomes and lecturer behaviours to specific elements of furniture layout, space construction, learning technology, built elements, room orientations and themes of vocational authenticity.

Presenters Biography

Helen Anderson is the Academic Director of one of New Zealand's largest polytechnics and an education researcher. She has been working with new, refurbished and reconstructed learning spaces to challenge the long held concept of a traditional classroom. Her work focuses on using the learning outcome as the driver for learning space design.