A Study of Pedagogy/Environment Fit

In 2014, the University of San Diego’s Center for Education Policy and Law and San Diego State University’s National Center for the 21st Century Schoolhouse set out to collaborate on a research study of pedagogy-environment fit at a newly designed high school.

Goals of the Study:
The purpose of the study was to explore the occupant experience in the new high school to better understand the way in which intentionally designed elements have been functioning in support of the project-based and blended learning curriculum.

Participatory Methodology:
- Literature review of the impact of physical learning spaces and student outcomes.
- Engaged staff in research design.
- Survey of teachers experience in the new environment.
- Teacher workshops explored the ways in which space was being used to support and enhance the educational program.
- Teacher-led workshops with students explored the student experience in the new environment.
- Focus groups with teachers gathered data on student experience and additional teacher input.

Research Questions:
1. In what ways do occupants leverage various design features on behalf of 21st century teaching and learning?
2. To what extent are specific design features related to the occupants’ individual and collective identities as learners and urban citizens?
3. How do various design elements foster a constructive relationship between school occupants and the community?
4. How did the process of educational commissioning contribute to or hinder the pedagogy-environment fit?
The Study Highlighted the Alignment of Design and Learning Approach in Four Ways:

**Collaboration**
Grade-level suites, shared commons, Think Tanks, writable walls, and comfortable furnishings help to cultivate a shared norm of student and teacher collaboration. These collaborative spaces and arrangements provide opportunities to explore, rehearse, and experiment together. Collaborative activities are routine, providing an authentic means for growth, both individually and as a school community. The nature of collaboration remains fluid as stakeholders continually sharpen the processes for, and the focus of, the learning.

**Transparency**
Windows and unobstructed views open learning spaces to one another and to the world outside. Views to the outside also provide visual rest and relief. Transparency allows students to develop as keen observers. Teachers can readily supervise student interactions and activities across various learning spaces, affording students access and freedom to move about and take full advantage of individual and group, academic and social spaces.

**Flexibility**
The flexible design features allow for ongoing changes in learning spaces to accommodate various purposes. The leadership of the school not only allows, but also encourages, personalization of learning spaces through changes in classroom layouts, adjustments to moveable walls and furniture, and temporary or more permanent installation of student work. This flexibility in design, and ongoing management of space, generates a sense of ownership and pride of place.

**Connectedness**
Students’ learning sprawls out across grade-level suites and beyond, nurturing a sense of connectedness with the larger student body, the central library, and the downtown community. The school’s location helps to foster students’ engagement as responsible urban citizens. The blended educational delivery system further extends students’ reach, linking them to the virtual community.

**Revealed Agency**
Teachers value their influence and control over the physical setting, making adjustments as necessary to accommodate personalized, project-based learning. Students also desire a sense of control within their learning environment. The design of the high school facilitates students’ independent navigation within the building, fostering feelings of safety and confidence. When students can “read” a school building, they feel independent and self-assured. The participatory research process contributed to an experience of agency in the use of the learning space.