

Chapter 1

Re/membering Pedagogical Spaces

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Educational spaces across the world largely continue to be designed with little variance from the traditional industrial classroom model, and pedagogies seem stuck somewhere between the Sage-on-the-Stage, lecture-dominated paradigm, and the Guide-on-the-Side, in which the instructor acts primarily as an aide watching, encouraging, and monitoring students working on projects individually or in groups. Rather than “reinventing the wheel,” the authors argue for an academic environment based on the British coffee house or French café of the 18th and 19th centuries. Not only should this 21st-century classroom offer an innovative melding of space and technology but also introduce a new pedagogical model. The Meddler-in-the-Middle model repositions the teacher and students as co-facilitators in the creation and use of knowledge in an environment where bodies move seamlessly in and out of collegial collaborations filled with free-to-fail open debate.

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INTRODUCTION

If you wanted to create an education environment that was directly opposed to what the brain is good at doing, you probably would design something like a classroom. If you wanted to create a business environment that was directly opposed to what the brain is good at doing, you would probably design something like a cubicle. And if you wanted to change things, you might have to tear down both and start over. - John Medina (2008) Brain Works, p. 5

The teacher claps his hands. “Pi,” he says, and in thirty seconds the students have moved the furniture into the shape of mathematical *pi*. As they do so, they are preparing their minds for engaging with an aspect of mathematical theory. The students understand what the shape of *pi* connotes as a learning challenge, just as they understand how to assemble it as a re-configuration of their mobile desks and chairs. Their act of re-configuration creates a class in which the pleasure of the rigour of engaging in advanced mathematical calculation is palpable. Co-creation and co-ownership of this suddenly reconfigured space work as powerful enablers of the learning that is intended here, aligning as it does the pedagogical purposes of the lesson with their precisely assembled aesthetic. Tomorrow, this same teacher will clap his hands and say “Happy Face,” and the students will re-arrange the furniture into that shape, at the same time preparing their minds mentally for a less intensive, “fun” engagement with math.

Next door, history students are using data and sound projectors to throw up the images and sounds of trench warfare onto their classroom walls, as they continue their investigation of World War One. A group of three students is rostered this week to be responsible for creating the audio and visual effects to support their study of the war “from the inside.” The adjustable lighting and the clean, sliding walls of the room provide an environment that is readily adaptable for this purpose, while still allowing the teacher and students to access written and other materials that are tucked away on shelving behind the sliding walls panels when not in use. Surrounded by the sights and sounds of the Somme on all sides, the students pursue their study as if from “inside the trenches.”

It would be pleasure indeed to be able to report that such instances of the confluence of an environmental aesthetic and a pedagogical intention are becoming the norm in this century. That is, to be able to affirm that teachers in schools, colleges and universities are now excitedly adapting classroom spaces to more innovative pedagogical purposes, inspired by what the new technological affordances of our times are making possible. Far from it, unfortunately. Educational spaces across

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