

New-age school design for modern learning

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A space that is not designed to make the teacher the centre of learning will always promote independent learning, both for groups of children and individuals.

By making the space learner- and knowledge-centric, we encourage students to take the initiative to access knowledge and information rather than have the teacher pass it down to them.

Our classroom design integrates open spaces that allow free movement and encourage activity. In addition, classrooms, play equipment and washrooms that are right-sized encourage independent use and action.

Flexible spaces change the dynamics of learning and teaching

Physical spaces that are customised and designed to be flexible are much more responsive to the changing needs of children and the curriculum and allow modifications according to lesson plans to maximize student engagement and classroom delivery.

Spaces designed while keeping in mind how children move, think and play will always elicit a more positive response from students.

For instance, rather than boxed-in classrooms, our multi-purpose rooms are built to be comfortable learning spaces that can be adapted to suit the needs of the curriculum and the tools required as teaching aids. 3. The child must be able to exercise choice in different situations

Rather than sitting rigidly on a hard bench or chair to receive instruction through the school day, the child must have the option to choose to think and do. Seating should be differentiated by the kind of activity a child would like to undertake: sofas, hard-back chairs, or stools and cushions that can be pulled up to the different-sized tables and benches.

Design should encourage collaborative work in large or small groups and equally, it must have small niches and nooks where a child can retire alone with a book or toy. Spe-

cially designed mobile trolleys can prompt activities such as gardening, maker space activities, or cooking.

Small tunnel-like structures in our classrooms add a mix of work and play areas in the same space, engaging children more strongly in both through common association.

Design must be alluring and safe

Huge impersonal architecture populated with hundreds, if not thousands, of students and teachers can often be extremely intimidating and emotionally threatening for young children. The intimacy and comfort that a smaller building offers to contribute a great deal to a child's emotional security and therefore the ability to be themselves. This fosters safe risk-taking and nurtures inquiry. Smaller areas also lend themselves to be custom designed for the needs of children.

Light, acoustics, air quality, zero dark areas as well as the use of pleasing colours and child-safe materials in structures, finishes and furniture all contribute to higher child engagement in learning centres.

New findings on learning theory has also revealed that school design is an important determinant of realising pedagogical goals. Learning spaces therefore should play a role in building small learning communities.

The comfort, familiarity and warmth that a community of, say, 250 students, teachers and parents can bring into a learning environment can go a long way into influencing the learning outcomes of students.

However, many of the principles of new-age school design can be used in school environments of any size. The Nordic design style for instance uses clean, straight lines in design elements to create a safe atmosphere and make it easier for children to project their thoughts and ideas. Another successful approach is to create clutter-free open spaces that encourage exploration and activity, whether it be for schoolwork or play.

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