

# Making the most of flexible learning spaces

A guide for principals and teachers



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# Flexible learning spaces

This guide is based on the experiences of Victorian principals, teachers, students and wider school communities in flexible learning spaces.



Flexible learning spaces are designed to be multidisciplinary and communal spaces, which can be configured in a number of ways for specific learning experiences. This means they provide opportunities for people to work together in new ways.

## How are teaching teams working together?

*You are constantly sharing ideas with other staff members. There is not a day or a minute that goes by that you are not seeing what someone else is doing, or they're not seeing what you're doing. (Teacher)*

*It has almost forced us to work with each other in the same ways we expect the students to. (Teacher)*

*Everything is open and we're learning from each other. I'll often be sitting in my work space and I'll hear another class going on and I'll see someone doing something, and I think 'Oh that's a great idea.' (Teacher)*

Parents also see the benefits of teams of adults working with their children.

*I think because they teach in teams, rather than just knowing one teacher, there's more teachers that kids can go to if there's an issue. (Parent)*

## How do relationships work in flexible learning spaces?

Flexible spaces have given teachers choices in the ways they interact with students.

*Every team has classrooms that have operable walls so they've got the flexibility of having large groups and more teachers in a room, or small groups if that's what they choose, depending on what they're teaching at the time. (Principal)*

*Teachers are out here with us as well. We think it's really good because we know where they are and we can talk to them when we need to. (Student)*

Teachers have a stronger sense of what the students are learning and how to make richer connections between different learning areas.

*Open spaces in VCE, and in science in the labs is something quite unique. Every class brings 'aha' moments which are different 'aha' moments from other experiences I've had. It's very energising what happens between students and students, and students and teachers, and teachers and teachers in these spaces. (Teacher)*

## What skills and talents do education support staff bring?

*I use the ES staff to take small groups to do reading, writing, and everything that I can think of. I use their expertise within*

*the classroom, not just working with one student or two students, but working with everyone. (Teacher)*

*We have brought youth workers in as well as people that are more skilled within particular trades so we can offer a rich learning experience for our kids. (Assistant Principal)*

## How do different spaces help to meet the individual and social needs of students?

*We can meet the individual needs of the kids far better and more effectively than you can in a traditional classroom with your 25 - 30 kids and one teacher. We are able to tailor the learning to suit the kids. Since we've got more adults in the learning spaces, we are able to group kids far more effectively, and target the needs of each one of those groups rather than just teaching to the middle. (Principal)*

*I think it makes it so much easier for the kids to move around and do different things with different teachers. You can cater for their needs a lot more easily without kids being labelled. (Teacher)*

There are also benefits to being able to bring large groups of students together.

*We block some classes together so for example we have 75 kids with 3 staff members, which means we can then break those groups up into a whole range of different environments. We can divide them based on ability, interest, or just randomly so that kids get to meet and work with other kids. (Teacher)*





## How do students use the spaces?

Students can group themselves in a variety of ways and take advantage of both indoor and outdoor learning environments.

*The environment forces you to work with other people, even in areas you don't usually work with others. (Student)*

*Students are getting better at grouping according to what their interests are and not just focusing on one little thing with their own friendship group. (Teacher)*

*The students can work in different areas, on tables, on the floor, whatever suits their learning style. (Teacher)*

*(Students are) really keen to rearrange the room differently. They enjoy that aspect of having the space and being able to do that. (Teacher)*

*Well, normally I learn everywhere in the school but I mostly learn outside and mainly inside as well. When I'm with my friends outside learning, it's more fun than just sitting in the classroom. (Student)*

# Planning to move in



Before moving into a new building or space there are many things to consider. It is useful to begin these conversations early on with staff, students, parents and the community.

## What type of learning do you value and want to encourage?

21st century learning encourages the use of a variety of teaching methods to meet the individual needs of students.

What spaces and resources will you need to do the following:

- Social and collaborative learning?
- Integrated curriculum?
- Student-directed/ teacher-directed learning?



- Independent learning?
- Project work?
- Direct instruction?

*The physical spaces have been a response to the desire for teachers to be working together and the advantages that brings to children's learning. We have really explored what experiences we want children to have. (Principal)*

*The new buildings were designed with the aim of giving students a contemporary education so they are equipped with the skills they will need to be successful and productive members of a 21st century workforce and society. The design of the learning areas was influenced by the need to be flexible and supportive of different learning styles. (Principal)*

## How do people feel about the new spaces?

Change can be challenging and it is important to acknowledge the emotions people are feeling throughout the process.

*You are moving away from intimate spaces that have a strong sense of enclosure to more generous and open spaces. Having worked on a number of schools in this way, what teachers say is that they very much like this way of working because they and the children can move spontaneously. They can make choices. They have got some control over what they're doing.*  
(Architect/Designer)

## Who should use the new spaces?

Here are some things to consider when deciding who should use the new spaces:

- Who decides? Is it the principal, teachers, and/or students?
- What does your school's student data tell you? Would some year levels benefit more from being in a flexible learning space in order to help you meet your school improvement goals?
- How familiar are staff with the design of the new space and the thinking and intentions that underpin it?
- Have you had conversations with your staff around the



spaces and the opportunities and challenges they provide?

- How will teaching teams be put together? What work has your school done around the development of teaching teams? Are some staff more ready than others to work together in flexible learning spaces?
- How many people will get to experience the spaces over time? Will you allow different teaching teams to have the opportunity to work in the new spaces?

## How will furniture and ICT be used in the new spaces?

Well designed and well utilised furniture and ICT equipment can enhance the flexibility and functionality of new spaces.

For example, modular furniture can be used to generate the boundaries for each specific learning area and be re-configured depending on the activities taking place.

When thinking about purchasing ICT equipment, schools should consider what kind of flexibility is required. How will equipment such as interactive whiteboards, data projectors and other resources be used by staff and students?

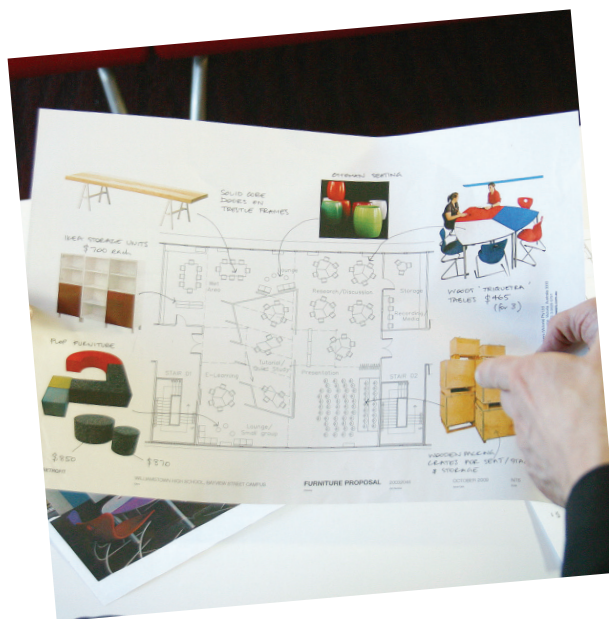
*Since we are not restricted to one classroom to use computers in, we take them outside and everywhere. Students are able to work on the floor if they want to, or on couches or at tables.*  
(Principal)

## What are some ways to engage students, parents and the wider community?

One way to communicate your school's story and learning goals is to create a fact sheet to explain how the spaces will be used.

While buildings are under construction arrange for year levels that will move into the new spaces to visit other schools with similar new facilities.

Once buildings are completed hold an open house so students, parents and the community can get a better understanding of the spaces and how they will be used for learning.



## How can staff visualise what it will be like to work in the new spaces?

Hands-on activities with staff around the building plans can assist them to understand what the layout of the new buildings will be.

Another option is to take a virtual tour of the spaces on the Department's website, where you can see a selection of learning spaces and get an idea of what the new facilities will look like upon completion.

Staff can also take a trip to visit other schools with similar buildings. They can speak with teachers and walk through the space to get an understanding of how it is being used and what it will be like to work in.

These visits can prompt discussions among staff and lead to ideas around working together and planning the curriculum to meet the individual needs of students.

# Evaluating how things are working



How will your school evaluate what is working and what is not in the flexible learning spaces? What adjustments and changes will you make based on the data you collect?

## What are some ways to gather data and evidence?

You can collect different evidence around the quality of student interactions, relationships of students and staff, quality of work being produced and student learning outcomes.

Some ways to gather evidence include:

- Recognising patterns of use through videos and photos.
- Use time-lapse video footage to observe the patterns of use within the flexible learning spaces. Have students and staff go around the school with a camera to take pictures of where learning takes place.
- Capturing feelings and comments about the flexible learning spaces. Use vox pop, journals, and/or blogs to have students and staff reflect on their feelings and how they are using the spaces.
- Looking at what your school data is telling you. Use results from school surveys and student learning data to see if outcomes are improving.

# DEECD Resources

## Publications

- [Pedagogy and Space](#)
- [Student Needs, Teacher Practice and Learning Spaces](#)
- [Research eLert: Learning Spaces](#)
- [Research into the connections between built learning spaces and student outcomes: Literature review](#)

## Events

- [Furniture Expos](#)
- [Innovative Learning Environments \(ILE\) Expos Series](#)
- [Innovative Learning Environments Design Conference](#)

## Other Resources

- [Building the Education Revolution \(BER\)](#)
- [Victorian School Design](#)

These resources are available at [www.education.vic.gov.au](http://www.education.vic.gov.au)

## Tell us your story

We are interested to learn how your school has made the transition into flexible learning spaces and how you are using them.

Contact us at [research@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:research@edumail.vic.gov.au) to share your experiences.