AROUND THE WORLD, COMMUNITIES CAN SEE A GAP BETWEEN THEIR ASPIRATIONS FOR EDUCATION AND WHAT THEIR LEARNING ENVIRONMENT WAS DESIGNED TO DO.

RINGING THE END TO "CELLS-AND-BELLS" SCHOOL DESIGN

Narrow corridors dotted with boxy classrooms, creating an industrial and institutional feel, have long defined the typical school. Leading architects Fielding International has fought against this approach and is launching an app to show how it can be done better. Nathan Strenge, Senior Learning Designer at Fielding, explains...

Imagine a space where you feel a deep sense of comfort. Take a moment and create your own mental picture of that environment. How would you describe the space you're imagining? Are you indoors or outdoors? What sounds do you hear? What kind of lighting enhances the comfortable feel? Are there places to sit or lie that add to your level of comfort? Does the environment allow you to move freely about the space?

One final question: is the space you're imagining similar to any school you ever went to?

Chances are the school you attended wasn't designed to provide a deep sense of comfort; nor was it designed to promote interdisciplinary learning. It's doubtful that it was built to cultivate belonging, wellness or creativity, nor any number of the things we want from our schools today.

Around the world, communities can see a gap between their aspirations for education and what their learning environment was designed to do.

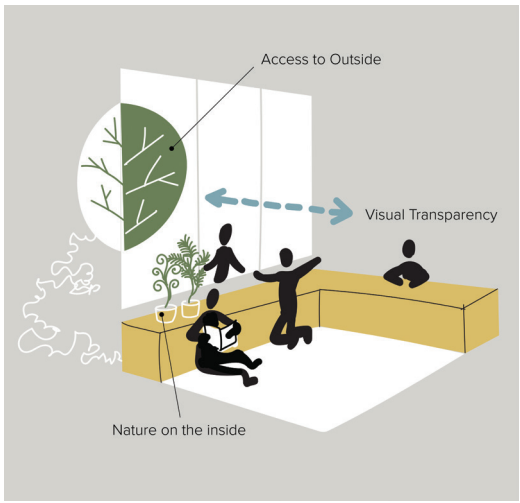
The problem challenge

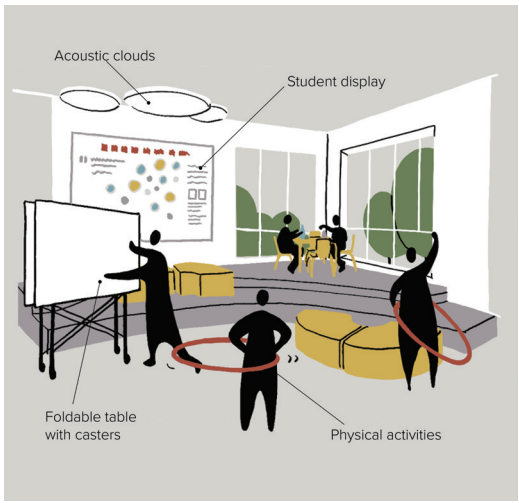
Throughout the twentieth century, facilities were largely structured around a "cells-and-bells" model – narrow corridors dotted with siloed classrooms, often creating an institutional or industrial feel, define this approach.

Despite efforts by schools to make learning more collaborative, active, interdisciplinary, creative – you name it – outdated school facilities are getting in the way of twenty-first-century learning goals.

And herein lies a critical problem. Because the cells-and-bells model rose to such prominence in twentieth-century school design, it's difficult for many to even imagine, let alone create, something markedly different.

So, despite a mismatch between conventional learning spaces and desired school goals, without the right language, tools and guidance, making a change presents an enormous challenge.


Access to Outside
Visual Transparency
Nature on the inside


Acoustic clouds
Student display
Foldable table
with casters
Physical activities

EDEN PARK - BEFORE

The origins of Design Patterns

Randy Fielding – founding partner of Fielding International – felt the problem of institutional schools as early as kindergarten. He developed a belief that creating learning environments to foster belonging, creativity and collaboration could radically improve life on this planet.

In 1998, Fielding launched DesignShare, one of the first comprehensive websites on architecture and learning. Through DesignShare, Fielding gathered 500 case studies and published more than 100 articles on learner-centred learning environments.

As Fielding analysed this wealth of data, patterns emerged about how learning environments could support thriving individuals in flourishing communities. He started drawing Design Patterns as simple sketches with annotations that got down to the essence of how a space works to solve an identified problem. He noticed it was often just a few key ideas that would break down the complexity of school design.

By the time Fielding co-authored *The Language of School Design* in 2005, DesignShare was at the height of its influence. The 40 original Design Patterns formed the base of a new way of thinking about space in schools. DesignShare was the first to define the Learning Community model as a paradigm-shifting alternative to the dominant cells-and-bells approach.

The Language of School Design put Fielding in the spotlight as a rethinker of school spaces. Fielding International now has a global reach, working in 50 countries on six continents, and has won prestigious design honours such as A4LE's MacConnell Award.

In every project, Design Patterns have served as a common design language, helping users to effectively imagine and communicate what they want from their learning environment. They have repeatedly found that school communities that dig into Design Patterns with a local group – often composed of

EDEN PARK - AFTER

teachers, administrators, parents and students – have a breakthrough moment in creating a shared vision for teaching and learning that leads to transformational outcomes.

Scaling transformation

Yet, 23 years after DesignShare went live, only a small fraction of young people around the world are fortunate enough to go to schools designed to foster belonging, creativity and collaboration. This is why, in autumn 2021, Fielding International is launching a new Design Patterns open-source library app to help reshape schools for the better.

The app, put together by Fielding International's 35-strong team, aims to democratise best practices in twenty-first-century school design.

The team will launch the app with 70 Design Patterns; each pattern will include a statement describing the problem it aims to solve, how it solves it, along with an annotated sketch, images of the pattern in action and a "Go Deeper" section linking to pattern resources.

By making Design Patterns free and available for anyone to use, Fielding International hopes to spur demand for school environments that foster collaboration, creativity and belonging. With the common pattern language, Fielding International aspires to give everyone the tools and access to create locally sourced learning environments where all people thrive in flourishing communities.

Over time, interactive features will be developed on the app so people across the world can share ideas, suggest new patterns, add research and resources.

Bring it home

The need to create learning environments that are responsive to the unique and holistic needs of every user has never been clearer. Design Patterns can help you bring twenty-first-century learning environments to your community. Find them freely accessible at www.SchoolPatterns.com. ■