



ISSUE

2

DESIGNING THE FUTURE
OF EDUCATION

Social Learning Spaces

If social learning has such positive benefits for school communities, how can we design buildings and campuses that support it?

The first step, is to understand what you're doing in the classroom now.

Students who participate in social learning are more engaged, more prepared and learn significantly more than students who don't participate.

Well-designed social learning spaces support learners in all aspects of their school or university life, and encourage them to extend their learning time at school or on campus and to interact with others.

The unique characteristics of your learning environment today are the foundation of your campus tomorrow.

How do teachers and students use the space?

How does it meet your needs?

And where does it fall short?

The answers to questions like these become the basis of a design that supports the learning experience you want to provide. They tell you how to most efficiently use the space and how to configure furniture and technology to create the flexibility and support your students want.

In the last ten years, many schools and universities have asked these questions and transformed their campuses into flexible and vibrant environments that support social learning.

In this edition of e-bites, we see how they've done it, and how these new spaces have benefited their communities.



BALNAVES MULTIMEDIA LEARNING CENTRE (MLC)

Bond University

How a social learning space revitalised the centre of the campus.

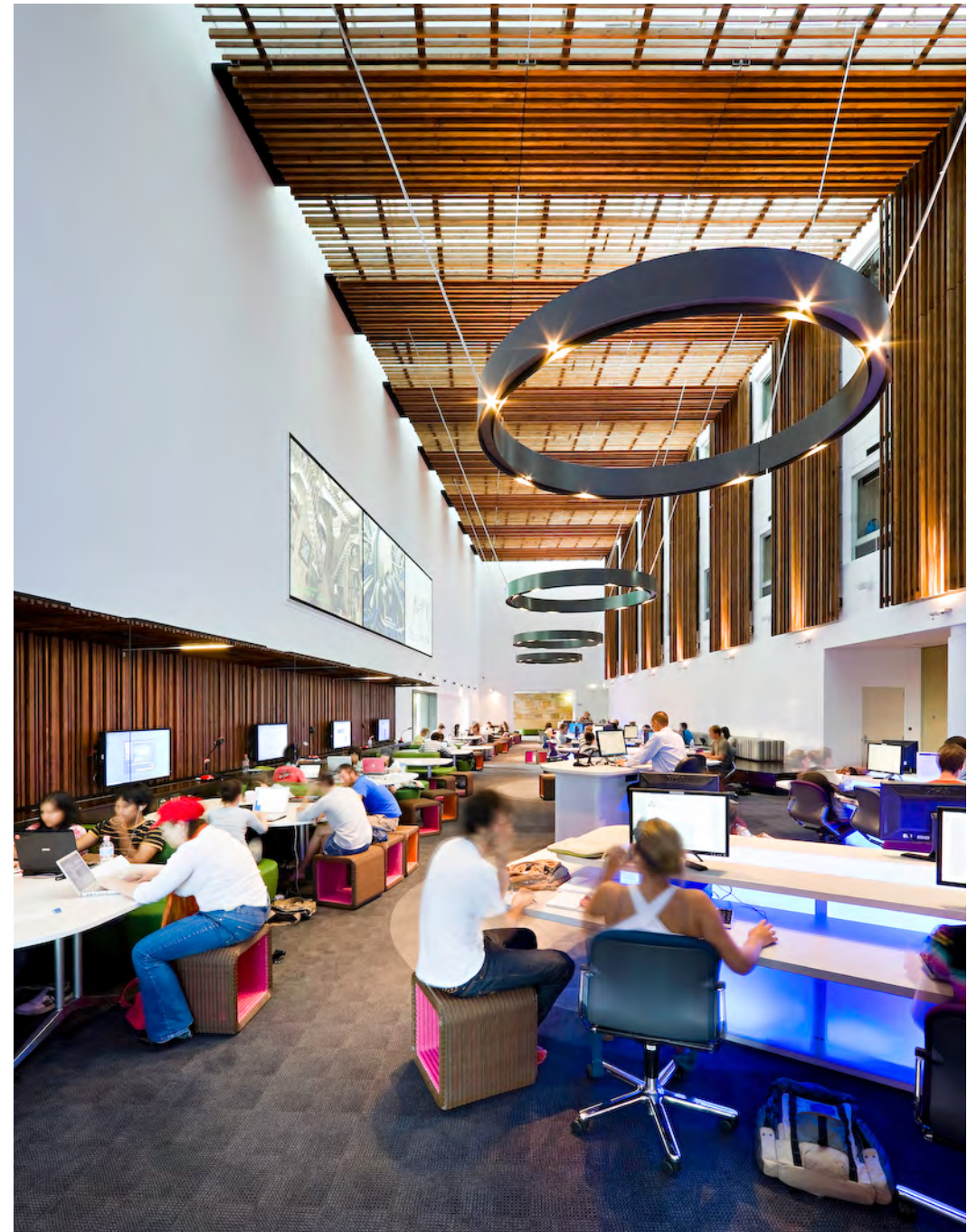
The Balnaves Multimedia Learning Centre began its life as an under-utilised art gallery in the centre of Bond University. It is now the most-used space on the campus catering to the social and study needs of the students while also being a digital gallery.

Within the first three months the centre had received over 100,000 visits with most students using the area for group activities — studying, socialising and gaming, linked to their course.

Research shows the centre is most often being used for extended learning or transitional learning between structured lessons.

What the students say...

“I find myself going there just to do work rather than at home because I enjoy the environment.”



The MLC is divided into zones that support at least six different study formats in the one place. The flexibility for students to quickly and easily move between types of study is a key factor in the design.



The Lilley Centre incorporates flexible learning spaces, the library, a contemporary forum space, student computer rooms, a teaching laboratory, and a function and seminar space.

CASE STUDY

THE LILLEY CENTRE

Brisbane Grammar School

How social learning spaces have changed the way students learn, and teachers teach.

The Brisbane Grammar School's Lilley Centre provides social learning spaces that meet the needs of flexible teaching and learning practices. The Centre, which was recognised in 2011 by the OECD Centre for Effective Learning Environments as one of 60 international education facility exemplars, has had significant unplanned benefits for the school.

Since opening, use of the Library has increased by 800%. During formal lessons, students are using the flexible learning areas to access information in a variety of different ways including teacher-led, on-line, and from their peers.

In some situations, teachers have begun team teaching with up to five classes being taught by a single teacher, while the other three or four teachers act as tutors, and have the opportunity to view how their colleagues work.

The social learning spaces allow the students to extend learning in spaces that replicate the classroom setting.

'The architecture and interior design have produced a light-filled spacious ambience that seems to absorb the busyness and energy of adolescent boys. From the outset, the boys inhabited their new spaces eagerly and enthusiastically, and the learning experience has been enhanced for teachers and students alike.'

Brian Short,
Brisbane Grammar School
Headmaster

CASE STUDY

EDUCATION CENTRAL

James Cook University,
Townsville

Social learning builds partnerships between teachers and students.

“One of the problems with existing university models is that academics believe they are accessible to their students but the perception of the student is that they are not.”

Hamilton Wilson,
Education Specialist/
Managing Director,
Wilson Architects

A major challenge for students is feeling disenfranchised both from their peers and their lecturers. Students say this is a common reason for disengaging from continuing study. The School of Education at JCU addresses this issue with a new academic office model that makes lecturers more accessible to students, and encourages collaboration between peers and academics.

The design co-locates academic office suites with social learning spaces, which makes it easier for students to seek academic support. The academic offices are eight-person suites, which also encourages collaboration between staff.

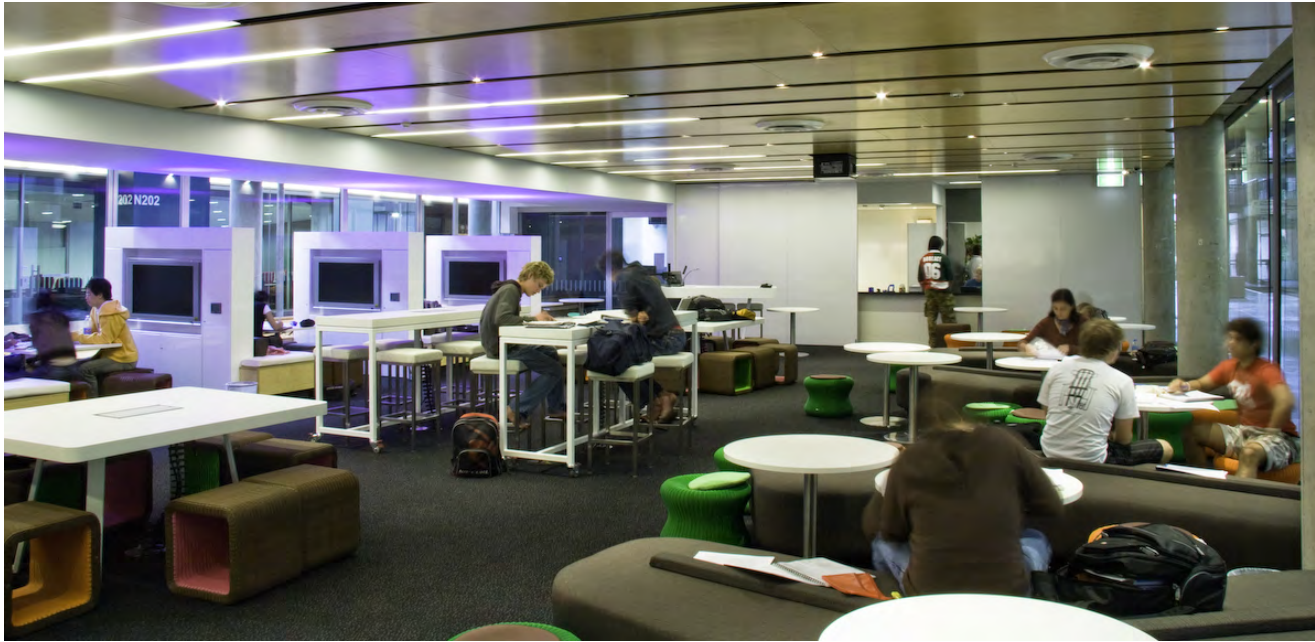
The student areas have reinforced a peer network, where teachers can drop-in, and extended learning can take place in an environment that replicates the classroom and provides a range of study formats.

Embedded technology like LCD screens and wireless internet enable students to study anywhere, any time and extend contact time on campus. Noticeboards and whiteboards allow students to brainstorm projects.

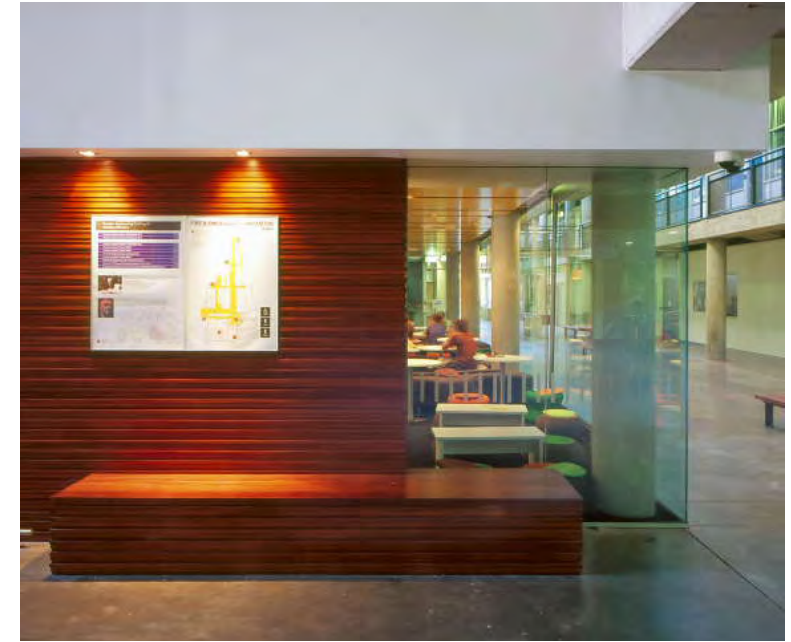
Because this space is now ‘owned’ by the School of Education, the students feel comfortable asking people they don’t know about study or campus issues in the knowledge that they are with one of their peers.



JCU Education Central focuses on collaborative learning: ‘student hubs’ encourage active learning and build partnerships between teachers and students.



The Learning Centre is placed at the confluence of the main circulation route, and now opens up views through previously enclosed tutorial rooms.



Feedback has confirmed that 93% of students use the space for group work.

CASE STUDY

FIRST YEAR ENGINEERING LEARNING CENTRE

University of Queensland

Making first year students feel at home.

The first year of university can be a challenging time for students. They can feel overwhelmed, alone and like they don't belong. The University of Queensland has created a social learning space for its first year engineering students where they feel they are part of the UQ Engineering community.

The Engineering Learning Centre is a place where students can meet to share ideas, help each other and to socialise. The centre provides a place where student groups can work collaboratively on shared projects or engage in peer tutoring and study groups. The students are engaged, enthusiastic and focused.

The Centre supports strong relationships between teachers and students, and among the students themselves. Simple strategies such as providing furniture that can be reconfigured to suit group work encourages students to interact.

Students have 'walk-up' access to their tutors, as well as access to librarians, lecturers, administration support, and the first year coordinator.

What the students say...

"at the ELC you can pull up a chair and gather in. You have a sense of identity by going in there, you feel like an engineer"

Q&A

Brent Hardcastle, Associate Director, talks about the key findings of the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) research project and the positive impact they can have on education design.



Can you tell us about some of the key findings of the research?

One key finding of the ALTC research is that all available space should be considered for its potential to provide teaching and learning, or community-building opportunities. Even circulation areas can support peer to peer learning — for example, a corridor with break out spaces and seating provides opportunities for interaction. This means the school can extract value from all of their space not just from traditional notions of Usable Floor Area (UFA).

How can schools maximise the potential within their classrooms?

The research showed teaching and learning spaces themselves should support a range of learning modalities in order to extend learning from teacher-led space into student-directed study areas. The more flexible the space, the more efficient it can be. Spaces which can adapt to different group sizes enable a greater range of teaching and learning possibilities.

A key education design issue for schools and universities is the inherent tension between the quality of student learning and the cost of learning delivery. Our research found that scaling up tutorial and seminar rooms to accommodate 99 students had many positive benefits on timetabling and cost of learning delivery. A space that is flexible enough to adapt from lecture mode, to group work and individual study across a range of class sizes is much more cost effective — you no longer have large lecture theatres standing

empty because they can be used for all sorts of learning modes not just traditional didactic learning.

What benefits does this kind of design have for schools and universities?

At a student and teacher level, the benefits for students include improved academic and social outcomes and a stronger sense of community. And teachers are able to use more innovative and flexible teaching modes and enjoy better interaction with students. Increased student satisfaction and better learning outcomes flow through to a better reputation for the school and a competitive advantage in the current market.

How do you apply the research findings in practice?

We start with an in-depth assessment of the various groups in the school (whole of school, each year, discipline and class groups) and the way they learn, teach and interact. We know that successful education designs are built on a solid understanding of potential teaching and learning modes and then designing to enable them. This understanding leads to better integrated planning and timetabling for the school, and better outcomes for students and teachers.

Wilson Architects has been at the forefront of education architecture for over 100 years. Our ground-breaking research for the Australian Learning and Teaching Council has given us unique insight into next generation learning spaces.

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NEXT ISSUE

Active learning spaces

THE LILLEY CENTRE

