Designing and Implementing Innovative Learning Environments

CEB
COUNCIL OF EUROPE DEVELOPMENT BANK
BANQUE DE DEVELOPPEMENT DU CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE



Education policy has shifted focus from ensuring schooling access to promoting learning outcomes for all. This shift has catalysed significant changes in teaching and learning that impact on school design.

The CEB has actively supported such changes by ensuring the financing required for education infrastructure investments in the Bank's member countries.

Some 95 000 children are already benefitting from new facilities in Finland alone, while work continues in Espoo, Helsinki, Kuopio, Tampere, Turku, and Vantaa.

The investments in Finland have provided the opportunity to identify best practices linking school design and learning. The CEB has worked with education authorities to draw on their experience in designing innovative environments that promote student learning outcomes.

A detailed account may be found in *School Design and Learning Environments in the City of Espoo, Finland* (December 2018), available at www.coebank.org.

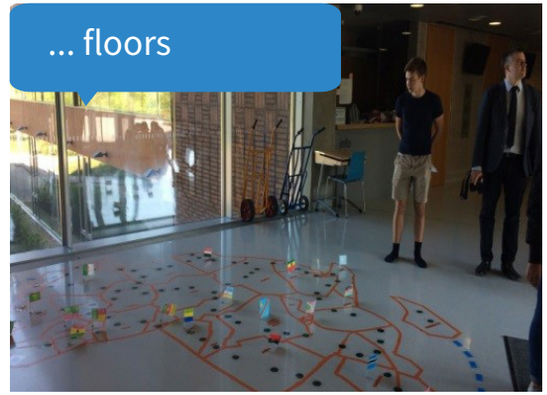
School Design to Promote Teaching and Learning

More Average Space per Child

On average, there is more learning space per child in Finland than in other EU countries.

This results not only from a more generous space allocation but also from using almost all available areas for learning purposes.

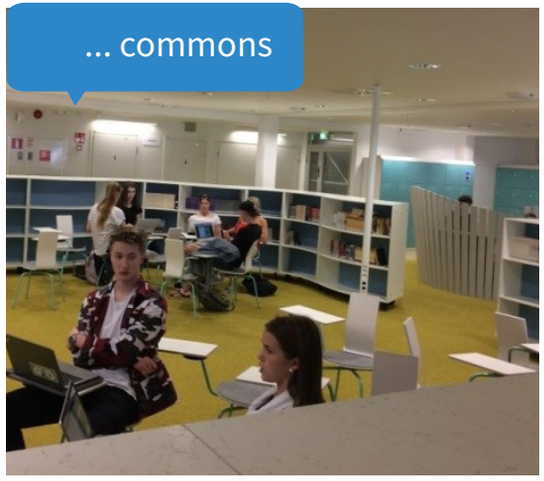
... floors



... schoolyards



... commons

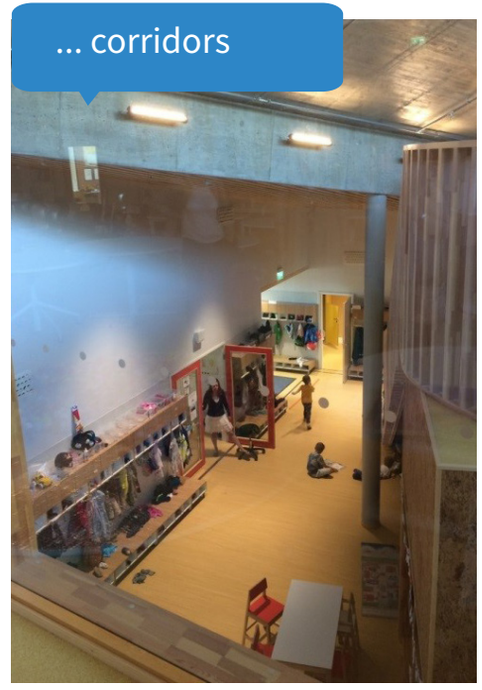


LEARNING SPACES

... cafeterias



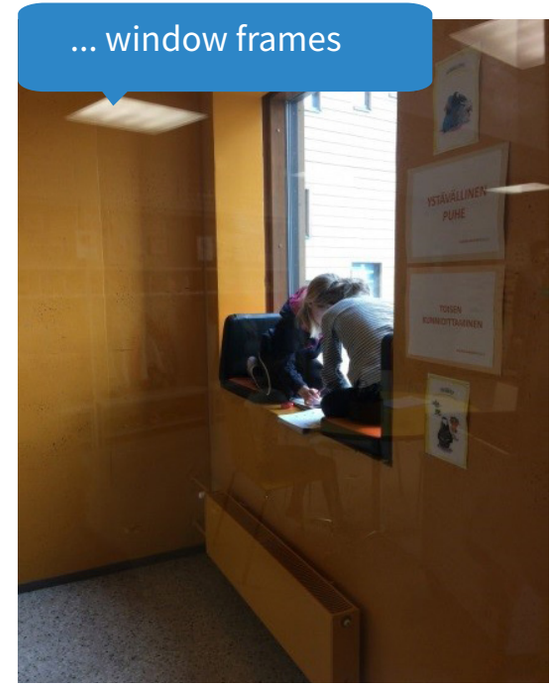
... corridors



... hallways



... window frames



Efficiency through Multipurpose Areas

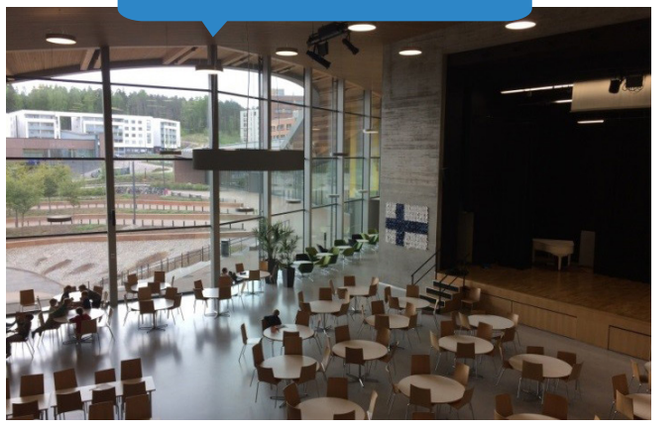
A large central space at the entrance helps to define the school identity. It also serves multiple purposes, particularly if there are surrounding staircases to ensure additional sitting areas. Such purposes include: dining, school performances, and large group assemblies.

A larger multipurpose area may be obtained through the use of sliding walls in between the central commons (cafeterias) and the sports hall.

School buildings are also designed to accommodate, in the same physical space, other public services, such as maternal, health, and community centres. The school library and sports facilities are open for community use, after hours. Such arrangements facilitate the community's access and reduce the local authority's overall investment costs.

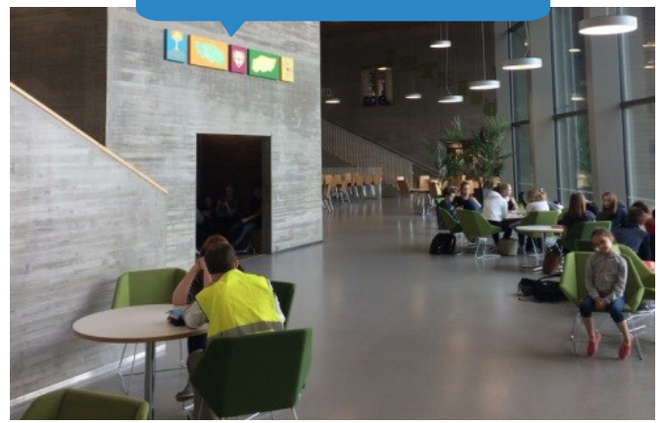


Dining and performance areas combined



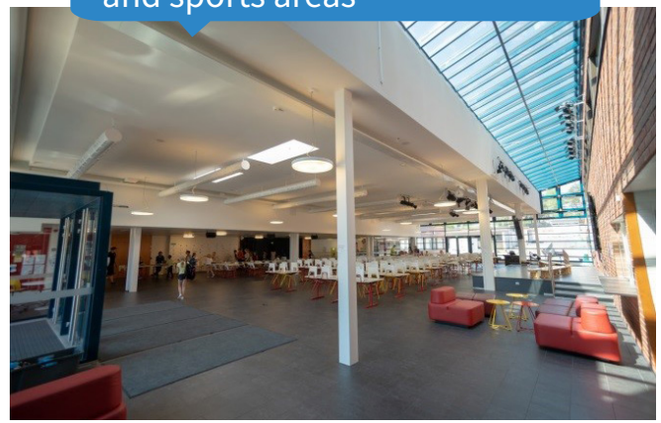


Cafeteria and learning areas in a shared space





Library next to the entrance and adjacent dining, performance and sports areas



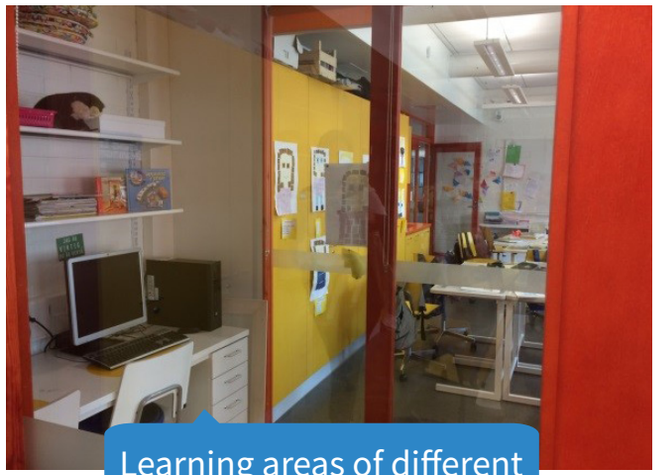
Differently-Sized Learning Areas

Differently sized areas facilitate the teachers' organisation of individual as well as small and large-group learning activities. The school can thus serve various educational purposes and individual learning needs.

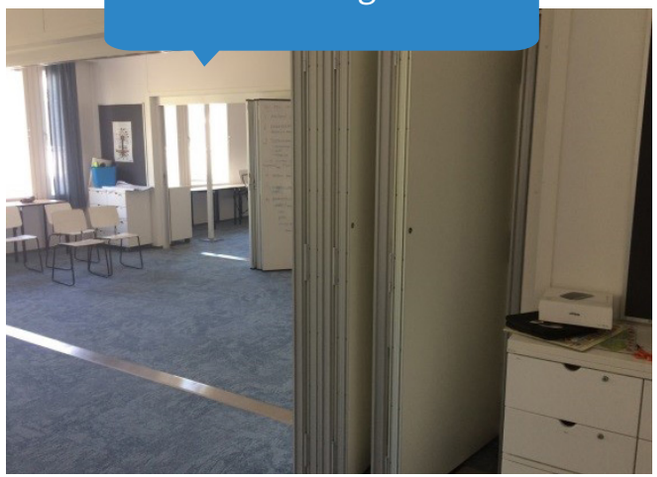
Children who need a quiet place to work, at their own pace, can be accommodated next to the main classroom while common areas can support small group activities.

Comfortable and varied furniture on wheels, folding walls, and information and communication technology tools that can be quickly rearranged enable a highly flexible use of space.

This type of learning environment fosters collaborative, multidisciplinary learning activities and team-teaching.



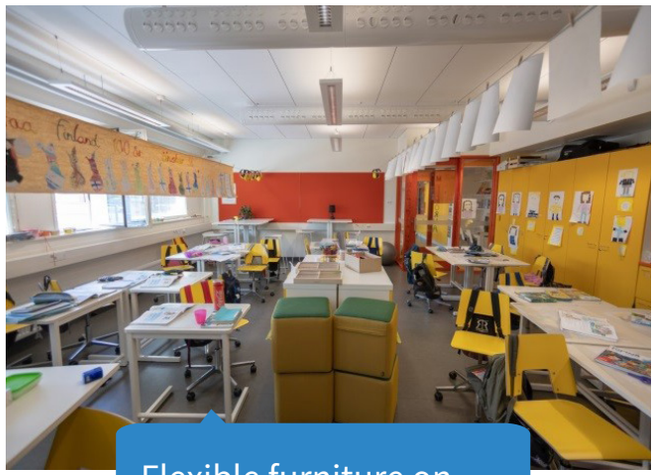
Learning areas of different sizes and folding walls



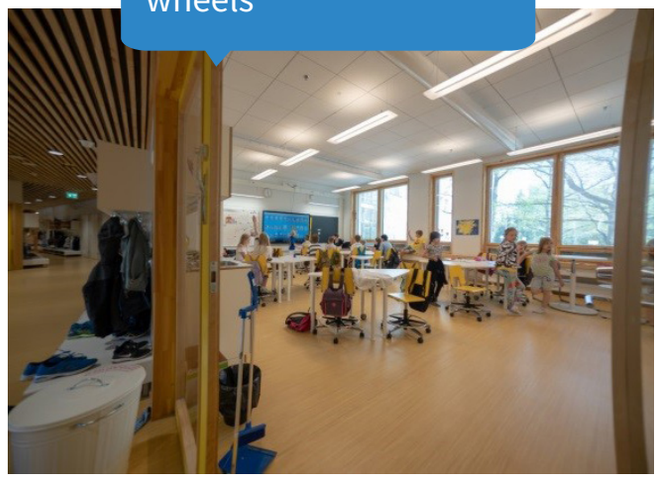


Integrated IT resources and comfortable furniture





Flexible furniture on wheels



Transparent Spaces

Transparency is common in Finnish schools and found throughout the buildings, created by open spaces and fully or partially glazed walls.

It helps generate a sense of connectedness as people can participate in the education process as observers or active players. Transparency also contributes to making learning visible, valuable, and shared.

Transparency and connectedness are also important in developing trust and accountability within a school community, promoting a common vision based on autonomy, respect, trust, and optimum working conditions for teachers.





Fully or partially glazed walls





THE TEACHING PROFESSION

- Autonomy
- Respect
- Trust
- Working Conditions

CEB Advice on Designing and Implementing Innovative Learning Environments

Balance Budget Constraints and Effective Learning Environments

- Designing effective learning environments does not need to be compromised by budget constraints.
- Agreeing on a set of key physical features that a model school should include to promote learning is essential; these features should never be the subject of budget cuts.
- Having learning areas of different sizes is one key feature of a potential school model; these areas can serve various educational purposes and accommodate individual learning needs.
- Standardising the choice of construction materials and promoting a compact design can reduce investment costs while providing for varied and flexible learning spaces.
- Developing multipurpose buildings and promoting the after-hours use of school facilities can improve cost-effectiveness.

Involve the School Community

- Engaging all school stakeholders should be part of the investment planning process, from the early definition of the education vision on the design to its translation into the design and construction briefs.
- Developing a shared vision for the new investments could be facilitated by a consultation process.
- Involving the school staff in the design process fosters a more effective use of the potential offered by the new learning environments.
- Testing pedagogical ideas and spatial solutions and visiting other schools should be part of the consultation process.

Support Teachers in the Transition

- Investing in the teachers' effective use of the potential offered by the new learning spaces should be a priority and should be included in the building cost.
- Supporting teachers in the transition to innovative learning spaces is necessary as it requires the development of new practices.
- Collecting evidence on how the new learning spaces work in terms of quality teaching and learning is essential; such data should drive the teachers' professional development and should trigger design improvements for future schools.

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