if flexibility is actually about enabling different modes of teaching and learning, then surely this is an issue of changing educational methods rather than spaces? In fact, what is required is a better understanding of the range of existing and potential teaching and learning modes in any particular situation, as well as the particular spatial and architectural conditions which can support them. (p. 18; emphasis added)

Although the book’s subtitle is Re-Thinking the Architecture of Post-Compulsory Education, it isn’t about how to design effective classrooms. It’s instead about the complexities of physical space and design; dwindling resources; flexibility and customizability; social processes and practices; comfort and discomfort (physiological, cognitive, and affective); situated rather than “obvious and generic” learning (p. 19); student misconceptions, confusion, and uncertainty; and informal learning in classrooms, formal learning outside of classrooms, and where we think where learning occurs. She also calls for the use of research methods that can capture some of these complexities (e.g., ethnography) to help us more fully understand what happens in “learning spaces.”

What we need, she says, isn’t examples of rooms and buildings that resolve these complexities as much as “proper research, creative methodologies and appropriate, constructive debate” (p. 170). She calls for “more ‘meeting places’ across and between different disciplines/communities of practice, both within post-compulsory educational institutions and beyond them” (p. 170), while also acknowledging that “we do not seem very good yet at learning from each other about learning” (p. 172). Yet.

The University of Calgary selected Boys as a keynote speaker for its 2016 Conference on Post-Secondary Learning and Teaching to mark the opening of the new building for the Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning, a $40 million building with six learning spaces furnished with cutting-edge technologies and chairs, tables, whiteboards, and instructor stations that are all on wheels. The Taylor Institute hosts these learning spaces for instructors to experiment with their teaching for a day, a week, or a semester. The goal isn’t to make them despair when they return to the classrooms across campus. Instead, it’s to give instructors and students the experience of teaching and learning in a radically different classroom space in order for them to experience teaching and learning in a radically different conceptual space. This is the most important “learning space” on campus— portable, shareable, free, and far more impactful. These instructors and students then take these new conceptions back to the existing spaces across campus. This is the way real change starts to happen.

REFERENCES


Boys will be returning to the University of Calgary’s Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning for a series of consultations and conversations from June 14 through 16, 2017. Email taylorinstitute@ucalgary.ca for more information.