



Accelerating change: Bean bags, writable surfaces and green screens

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What was clear from the conversations I had for the Accelerating Change podcast is that we have entered a period of change like none other seen in human history. To thrive in the emerging economy young people need to think differently. We have to teach for innovation, but how?

The current trendy thing for schools is innovation. For many, the interest in innovation comes from the STEM or STEAM push. For others, it is about entrepreneurialism and ensuring they keep up with the Jones'.

I see that lots of schools across the country, particularly independent schools, have either built an 'innovation centre' or are in the process of designing one (and I confess, St Paul's School is one of those schools). Other schools, fearing that they might be left behind in this latest 'arms race', are touring around, pinching ideas for their new space.

It intrigues me. If you visit some of these spaces you will see that they are filled with funky furniture, perhaps like you'd see in a Qantas lounge, or an open office space designed for 'entrepreneurs'. Bean bags and writable surfaces, like desks and windows, and green screens seem to be the order of the day. The hope being, that if we create a funky space filled with the latest technology and furniture people are going to somehow alter their mindset and become more innovative.

I am sounding cynical, but perhaps you have noticed the same as I have: Impressive new buildings but little activity in them that you would call innovation. Fun spaces to visit, but to go back to for any real educational purpose; well, you can't teach properly unless there is order and structure, desks in rows facing the front so the students can learn from me (*or can you?*).

The genesis of this article was a recent visit from a school who had been on a reconnaissance trip to help them design a new innovation space. By the time she had got to St Paul's School (the last school on her tour), she had come to the conclusion—and the point I'd like to make—*that unless you change the activity, the space is useless*. And you don't change the activity by changing the physical space, you have to change the mindset of the teacher, and that isn't easy, because like it or not, we've all been conditioned to think what the act of teaching is supposed to look like.

The issue of innovation, and entrepreneurialism, is a little like the issue of class size. Over the past few decades huge amounts of money have been spent to reduce class sizes with little to no positive effect on student learning. This is because, again, if you don't change the activity with the change to the environment you have wasted the money.

Likewise, there are increasing numbers of schools jumping onto the notion of entrepreneurialism. Single opportunities, like a workshop, or a shark tank experience, will have little effect if you haven't changed the mindset of the students and staff coming to those opportunities. In fact, emerging evidence would suggest that these single opportunities are actually having the reverse effect.

The good news is that you can change the activity to create mindsets of creativity, innovation and entrepreneurialism. But it isn't achieved by building trendy buildings, bean bags, writable surfaces or bolting on a STEM program. It is achieved by embedding a school-wide teaching and learning framework that is designed to teach for innovation and then supporting teachers to change their activity and mindset.

For the last 10 years we have been focusing on the activity in the classroom before we came to designing our innovation centre. Sadly, there won't be a bean bag in sight in that building, but if you are interested in real innovation have a look at www.realmsofthinking.com.au It is a framework that will change the activity and the mindset of all.