

Stephen Heppell – a challenge for learning

STARTS: 00.07

Toilets. What you don't want are big industrial toilets. Think back to your own school days or the students in here think about now: the reason the toilets are hideous is because you only go to the toilet when the bell goes. The bell goes and one of these bizarre things we do in the school, like thinking a thousand teenagers will be hungry simultaneously which is bizarre. If I gave you a thousand rats, you couldn't train them to all be hungry at the same time. But we've rung a bell, it's time to eat - yeah right. I was starving at 11 and he had a pie at eleven, so he doesn't want to eat until two.

So, try and build personalisation, individualisation into the thing, that includes the toilets. People all don't want to go to the toilet because it's 11 o'clock. So one way of doing it is to put toilets into all the learning spaces, so you're always a couple of steps away from a toilet. (It's one of my Caribbean schools.) Another way to do it is to build unisex toilets which sounds shocking but when you see how bestial girls are, in particular, in toilets – they're hideous. Boys are just messy. You put the two together and you get civilisation. How many of you have got unisex toilets in your homes? [laughter]. Oh well, there you go. Look, it works in schools as well. So these are all school toilets where they share.

This was a funny one, because when the school opened unisex toilets they had a small number of parents open a Facebook group to object to, and I quote, "the depravity of unisex toilets". The cubicles have got doors - what's depraved? The school immediately capitulated, and said, 'right right, we've gone back - the boys are on this side, the girls are on that side.' [laughter]. Oh that's fine - still no wall. Look they're everywhere.

Also, when you come to a school toilet, usually you go along the corridor, around the corner and then you go through a door and you're in what I think architects call the bullying ante-room. It's a special room designed for bullying and smoking, it's a dodgy room and then the toilets are off that. Why would you do that? Why not open up that door and if the rules say...

This is a school in America; look at the gap between the doors, I can see into the toilet. Eighty-seven percent of children go through their entire school career without defecating in the school toilets. Seriously, for a minute, *physiologically* what's that doing, it's about bad design.

That's not a very good [laughs] example – nor that. That one's in a school in Amsterdam and the red light I think is a vocational thing. [laughter]. But look at this one here: this was built by a pervert wasn't it? Surely to God. In a world where every kid's carrying a camera, building a toilet wall that doesn't even go down as low as the bowl, that person presumably is in prison by now, but if not, they should be. Of *course*, the doors have to go to the floor. Of *course*, they have to go to the top of the rim. Of *course*, you would want wash basins *in* the cubicle as well as out. If you're a kid and you soil yourself, now you've gotta go outside to wash your pants - how's that gonna work?

We're *mad*: we haven't thought through what it's like to be a child.

Every detail of our learning spaces matter - *every single* detail. Don't just get the architects or the Head... Everybody in the community, *every* parent, *every* child, every teacher wants

to be working on every detail, from the carpets, from the flooring. So this is *you* building, I have only shown you history, remember - I haven't shown you anything from the future, I've just shown you old stuff from around the world.

Look here's two. This is ancient history we'll start with. This was me building. A lot of these obviously I've been involved with the build process of, but these are classrooms of the future. This was a government project in England back in 1990, whenever it was. They thought our classrooms should be all these things - well of course they blinkin' should.

But rather sensibly they started off with some drawings from children, which was nice, and I was lucky enough to win one of those projects, so we built our ingeniums, which looked like this. The design was to build something that got in the way of learning as little as possible - a quite nice design intention - and the kids had all sorts of things to say, not the least of which they said, let's have multiple screens. We often want to present work to each other, let's have toilets in the room. They got *two* toilets by the way. I said, "Why do you need two toilets? There's only one classroom" They said, "It's Eric. We don't know what he does in there, but he's there an awful long time." [laughter]. So we got a toilet and an Eric toilet. You have to listen to your kids.

There's a *serious* problem here with the design of these spaces, which is that your government knows how to make *efficient* schools - they know how to make schools that don't waste energy, but they don't know how to make schools that don't waste learning. So they'll make you do all the things that save energy and most of them are catastrophic for learning. You'll have small windows, doors, corridors, low ceilings - all the things that would get in the way of children's learning.

You want to design schools that are fabulous for learning and then see how efficient you can make them afterwards - and the most efficient way to do that is to make the children aware of all the issues. Make it transparent in terms of its energy use, so they know when they open the window that there's a bill going somewhere which is putting up the price of sandwiches - do it like that. But don't build an efficient school and then, 'I'll tell you what - a bit of a gamble - let's see if we can do learning in there.' That's *entirely* the wrong way around. And you'll have to fight like mad, because they'll say, 'But we've got this table here that says how much electricity is leaking out of the window,' and you say, 'Well, sod that, look how much learning's leaking out under the window, because there's not enough natural light coming into the room.' You'll have to fight for learning. But you know what it looks like: you're teachers and parents.

Here: that was our dream of what it was gonna look like and then we set to. I'm a sailor, so I got a boat building company of course to build the damn thing, which was pretty cute. That was what it looked like when it was finished. We were really pleased with it and the kids loved to be in it and they built flies; they were proud of what they've produced. But look at the date on that: that was 2008. We opened in 2002, so that's what ancient history looked like - you can do better than that; that was more than a decade ago.

If I look at what's happening in England: this is Ambrose School and this was one of our top 5% schools in the country, in exam terms. It's a Catholic school - fantastic performance. They *weren't* satisfied: they wanted to be the top 2%. So they've ended up building themselves - they're getting these with the architect's drawing. By the way, that's a climbing wall right down the side. If you've got a big flat wall, make it scary: there's nothing wrong with

a bit of fright in learning - it's really good for kids. Yeah, put a rope around their neck, so if they fall off... [laughter]

Here's what they thought it was gonna look like inside. You think flip, this looks like architects' cut away drawings of the dream of the place. By the way, you can tell it was a Catholic school, because the footprint of it was a cross. There's lots of different things you can do with the outside of your school but make the inside seductive and lovely for learning. Their dream was that it would look like this inside.

These aren't cut away drawings - this was it: there were no walls. Sound is modelled. Children learn and work in small groups - you don't have to put them in cells to make them quiet. You have to make them *want* to be quiet and then they're quiet - it's really really easy.

Of course, these are the architectural drawings, so you think, yeah, right, Stephen, but they didn't build it like that, did they? And here's the building and here's the inside - yeah they built it like that, exactly like that.

But again, I'm just showing you history. Everywhere around the world people are saying, I'll tell you what, folk, I wonder how good learning might be.

Here's the WISE conference big global summit of what learning looks like. Every kid in every country. If you add up all the children in history who've ever been to school, ever - the Phoenicians scratching away with their clay tablets on the banks of the Euphrates trying to remember their cuneiform alphabet. If we add up every kid in history, more children leave school in the next 30 years than ever did.

So you're right at the beginning of this *extraordinary* time of global learning and you're either gonna light a flame, a beacon and people are gonna say, that's how good learning can be, or you're just gonna build something dull. What choice is there? This is the most fun you're gonna have ever, ever, well with your clothes on, [laughter] and that's about it. So just go out there and be brave: you can change the world we're learning and you do it starting right here.

[musical interlude 8.52 to END]

Recording ENDS: 9:00