



SCHOOL (E)SCAPE

An alternative to the lowest common denominator for temporary learning spaces that is the pre-fab.

School

Dundalk Grammar School,
Louth

Architects

Idir Architecture
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'Only that which does not teach, which does not cry out, which does not condescend, which does not explain, is irresistible' William Butler Yeats.

Intrigue and influence from the above quote made aware to us that the aims of *A Space for Learning* would be best addressed through an open and recorded dialogue. Workshops, discussions, brainstorming and spatial experiments between IDIR (www.idircatalog.net) and the Dundalk Grammar School students took place and were maintained using an online weblog 'Learning Space' (<http://aspaceforlearning.wordpress.com>).

Initially 'Learning Space' was created as a platform for exchange and to gain knowledge of each-others perceptions and understanding of existing architecture and space. As our conversations developed we began to reactively explore design issues raised. These issues varied from aesthetic, spatial efficiency to environmental and economic concerns. A result of this was the creation of the 'Post-Fab' Learning Bubble the conceptual antithesis of the learning space that is the 'Pre-Fab'.

At best utilitarian but unarguably mundane and uninspiring, the pre-fabricated building proliferates across educational facilities throughout the country. Often proposed initially as temporary solutions, built to design principles that establish a lowest common denominator (one size fits all), they can sometimes remain in use as classrooms for anything up to 10 years, or the entire life-cycle of a typical students attendance at school.

Although we perceive buildings as the longest lasting manifestation of human activity, these too are constantly changing and at great cost because they are created using a process that requires deconstruction before construction can take place once more. This is wasteful in building resources, ecologically damaging and inefficient in terms of placing the facility out of use for substantial periods. Nevertheless, this method of responding to change has become the norm, virtually without challenge.

The 'Post-Fab' Learning Bubble is to provide something light and stimulating allowing an inherent flexibility with regard to site placing and internal usage. Learning Bubbles can be easily erected, deflated, moved, stored and inspire a consciousness of building. Society exists through the collaboration of individuals sharing skills and resources. Continued progress in society occurs when new ways of working together are found. Therefore perhaps the most important architectural spaces outside the home are the places that have been established where meetings between individuals occur. We should demand this of our learning spaces and aspire to an irresistible architecture.



'I thought architecture was just about construction. I never realised it could be so creative and about different ideas'.

Thomas Campbell, TY Student at Dundalk Grammar

During the second stage of *A Space for Learning* students further developed discussions towards developing a national exhibition completing a stop-motion film based around their ideas and reactions to the Pre-Fab in their own school while sketching potential alternative ideas of Post-Fab bubble spaces.

The 'Learning Space' Map (Scale 1:1000m // Abstract) is the beginning of a departure beyond the confines of the Dundalk Grammar School. The large map creates a physical and perceptual space to further ones understanding of their own context, scale and make subsequent connections. Students both past and present were encouraged to overlay their own thoughts, ideas, impressions and memories of learning spaces in Dundalk.

This contextualized dialogue, together with the students stop motion video, will initiate further open recorded discussions as part of the national touring. We are inviting participants to respond with their thoughts on the concepts raised in 'learning space' by making these on the paper and in turn forming these into paper planes to accumulate as part of the exhibition dialogue, collected and displayed as the tour and conversation develops.

The familiarity people have with the 'paper plane' and its use as a device to continue the participatory, engaging, and open source response is fundamental to the ongoing 'learning space' process. The Paper Plane embodies the liberation of ideas, reactionary nature and flexibility inherent in the concepts emerging from this project. We look forward to hearing your comments and seeing your paper plane(s)...

Ryan Hamill, Eoin McElroy of IDIR Architecture.

Participants

Sharon Brown (TY Coordinator), Cyril Drury (Principal), Thomas Campbell, Barry Faulkner, Kaleb Honer and Lucy Van Dijk.

