



Selling to the Education Market

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How to Create Effective Learning Environments

By Terry Carroll, Market Intelligence Manager, Kimball® Office, and Rebecca Denison Schultz, President, d2p, LLC

The ways in which educators teach and students learn are shifting drastically and furnishings for today's learning environments need the flexibility to adapt to different users, different applications and ever changing technologies.

An educational environment, especially in colleges and university settings, should be suitable for a diverse audience, with students of all ages, gender and stature.

No matter the purpose of the classroom, the furnishings must be durable and "student friendly." Schools look at furnishings as investments and want to ensure they can hold up against many years of rowdy group discussions and projects.

Space for many institutions is limited, which requires classrooms to be multi-functional and flexible.

Designers and dealers must take advantage of all available space, including walls for incorporating learning tools, such as whiteboards, tack boards, projector screens, desks, and computers.

It's not uncommon for a room to be used for both private, individual work and collaborative instruction many times a day, yet another reason why flexibility of furnishings must remain top-of-mind.

The same holds true for computer labs, which may be used as classrooms, group meeting spaces and study areas.

Good design evokes emotion and promotes creativity, which are obvious objectives in any learning environment.

When students and faculty feel comfortable, information may be retained at a higher level and discussions will flourish.

By providing the tools collaborative open spaces and classrooms need to encourage creative thinking, a dealer and designer can create an environment more conducive to effective learning.

We know what is needed for an effective learning environment, but what should facility managers, dealers, and designer remember when planning? Consider the following five elements when selecting furnishings:

1. Flexibility, including with technology
2. Maintenance
3. Cost of ownership
4. Ergonomics
5. Sustainability

While cost, durability, functionality, comfort and safety are always important to consider, understanding the needs of the work environment—such as group discussion, lectures, or study time, to name a few—is critical.

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Team huddle areas and lounges are increasingly popular on campuses — especially with students who have access to wireless technology and devices.

However, seating in labs, conference rooms, and lounges can also contribute to creating an effective learning environment.

Slouching and leaning forward in a chair can cause common aches in the neck, head and shoulders, and leaning forward can compress the abdomen, which decreases respiration.

The best option is to encourage clients to invest in chairs that allow for adjustments for workers' different body types and statures. Important features include height, arm and seat depth adjustments, as well as tension controls for the back.

Of course, even with adjustments, one chair may not fit everyone's physical and cognitive needs.

Finally, with a majority of classes taught indoors, sustainability and indoor air quality (IAQ) are important factors to keep in mind when selecting furnishings.

Certain chemicals used in raw materials, adhesives and finishes can contribute to poor IAQ as a result of the gasses they can produce.

Socially-responsible furniture manufacturers recognize the impact their products have on the people using them and many

follow IAQ standards and guidelines recommended by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC), and the Business and Institutional Furniture Manufacturers Association (BIFMA).

Indoor air quality also impacts institutions choosing designs and products based on the USGBC Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) system.

Facility managers, dealers, and designers must be aware of the needs of schools, students and faculty, and cognizant that a chair and desk may not simply be a place to sit, but a way to increase learning and productivity.

Terry Carroll

A six-year member of the Kimball® Office team, Terry Carroll, currently serves as a market intelligence manager, focusing on external market trends, end-user evaluations, competitive intelligence, and industry technologies.

Rebecca Denison Schultz

President and founding partner of d2p, an Indianapolis, Ind.-based Kimball® Office select dealer, Rebecca Denison Schultz, is known for introducing positive changes in work environments. The company recently completed projects for Indiana University in Bloomington, Ind. and Ivy Tech Community College in Logansport, Ind.

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