

Sense Sensitive Design and the Optimal Learning Environment

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Within the education field, interest is growing in the relationship between the learning environment and its potential impact on learning, achievement, engagement, motivation, behaviour and sense of well-being for both the student and teacher.

Over the last eight years, Nightingale Associates has been researching and developing design tools and guidance based on the way the body perceives and responds to sensory stimuli within our environment. These tools have enabled us to design spaces more skilfully and incisively, focusing on key design issues that include – but are not limited to – physiological and psychological effects of colour, light, sound, views, touch, smell and the passage of time.

Active and alert - choreographing the learning environment

We are now applying this knowledge to consideration of how children learn, in order to inform the design of optimal learning environments that can respond better to an individual's needs – whether pupil, student or teacher.

In conjunction with the BCSE and Higher Education partners, we are developing a robust pilot research project to test the emotional receptiveness of both learners and teachers within their learning environments. Following an in-depth literature review completed in 2008, the practical element of our research project will commence this year in a London primary school. Our intention is that the research project will help teachers to choreograph their environments in order to optimise learning and help direct the best use of capital investment in schools.

