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RETHINKING CLASSROOM LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS FOR THE FUTURE

A LEARNING WITHOUT BOUNDARIES WORKBOOK



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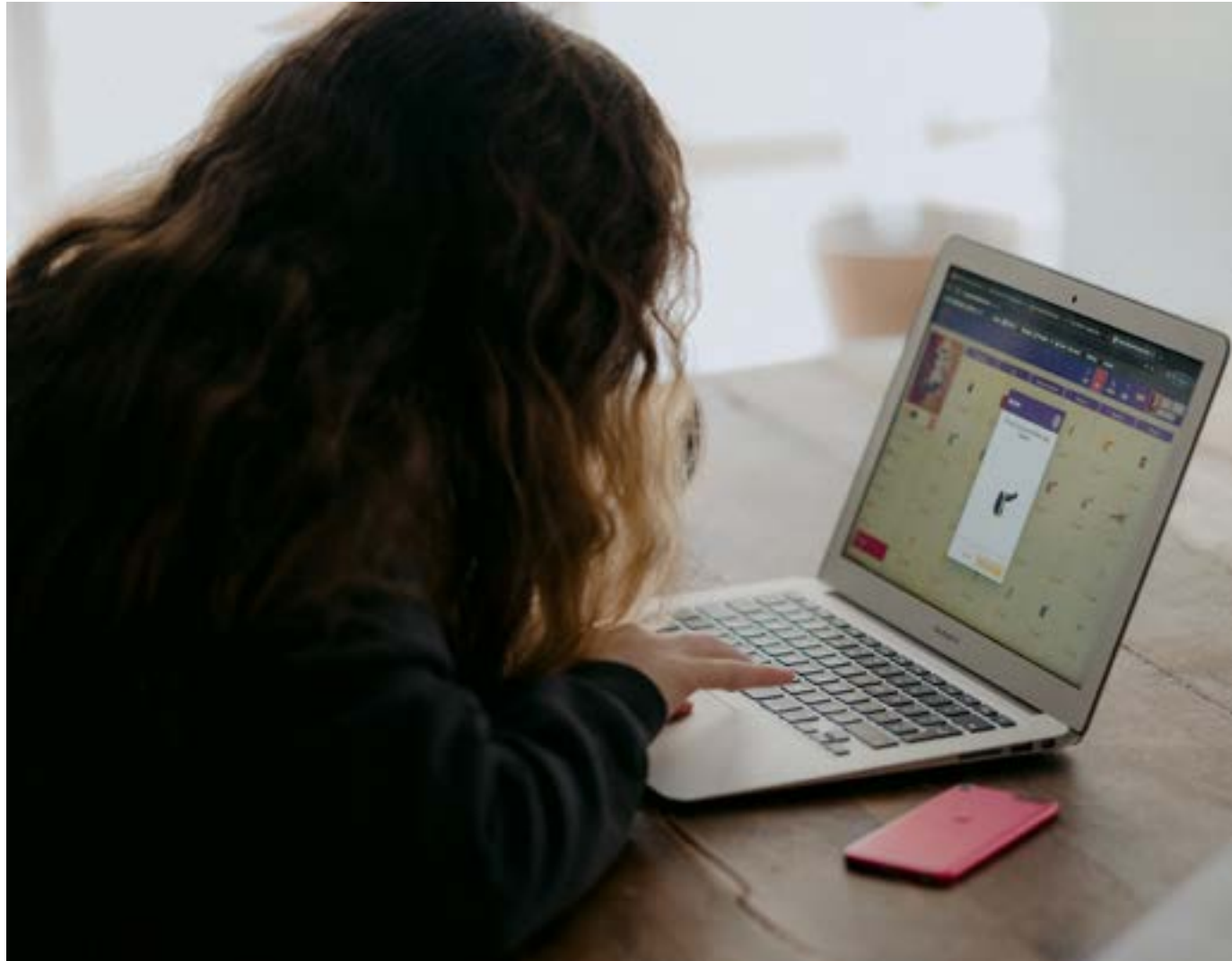
CAN WE AGREE THAT 2020 ROCKED OUR WORLD?

From “what” you taught to “how” and “where” you taught, everything was turned upside down as your school scrambled to keep students healthy and safe, without neglecting their need for continuous learning experiences and support.

If you are passionate about the field of education and you are eager to learn more about how COVID-19 has impacted (and continues to influence) the modern learning environment, this eBook is for you! Over the next few chapters, we will dig into:

- ✓ how COVID-19 forced us to consider new options in teaching and learning.
- ✓ modern learning and how classroom environments impact student success.
- ✓ the key components of a successful student-centered learning environment.

Most importantly, you will gain some best-practices and inspiration for setting up and creating your own successful, student-centered environments in a post-COVID-19 school.



1

WHAT WE ARE LEARNING FROM THE COVID-19 DISRUPTION IN SCHOOLS

We are all learning more each day about how COVID-19 has disrupted educational systems around the world. The 2020 pandemic forced schools to close and left educational leaders grappling to find the most effective and efficient way to provide continuous learning opportunities for students. Lacking training and adequate resources, teachers worked tirelessly to figure out ways to keep remote students engaged. I think we can all agree, the teachers have been the true heroes of this story.

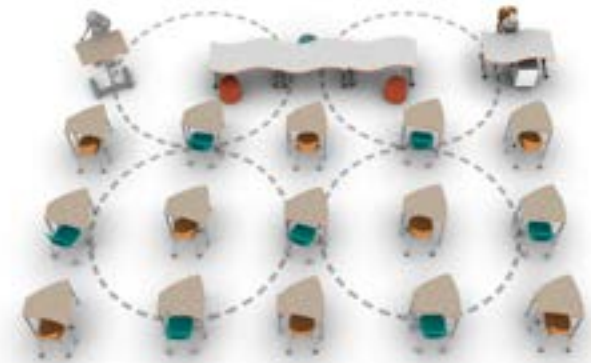
Then, when schools started to reopen in the Fall of 2020, school leaders faced even more obstacles as they brought some students back to in-person learning, while others remained virtual. To maintain the health and safety of students and staff, leaders put in place systems for social distancing, reducing class sizes, increasing sanitation, and enforcing temperature checks. Accommodating these new procedures pushed collaborative and innovative learning and teaching strategies on the back burner and forced the setup of classrooms backwards—

putting desks in rows and encouraging students to work independently on assignments.

Knowing we must prepare for today, where does that leave us in planning for tomorrow? How do we learn from the good and bad of remote and hybrid learning and determine what should change, what could shift, and what we can we do without?

As the effects of COVID-19 continue to impact the present and future of education, it is important we take time to reflect on 2020 and how we can use it as a time for growth and innovative thinking.

Planning for today:



Preparing for tomorrow:



In an article of Education Week, ["How Hybrid Learning Is \(and Is Not\) Working During COVID-19: 6 Case Studies,"](#) author Mark Lieberman interviews teachers and education leaders around the U.S. to understand what they are discovering from the challenges, the successes, the benefits, and the takeaways of virtual and hybrid learning.

From this article (and other academic work), we can conclude that:

- ✓ learning in-person is important for students' social and emotional health. Teachers prefer connecting with students in-person to build trusting relationships.
- ✓ technology is a great tool for enhancing learning opportunities for all students. Remote and hybrid learning is easier to implement when students have access to technology.
- ✓ parents report that their students are finding success in the remote setting for reasons such as less distractions and manageable content.
- ✓ parents working from home with students learning remotely gave teachers and parents new ways to connect, creating various levels of parent involvement.
- ✓ well-designed and personalized learning activities fare better than traditional lecture-type lessons.

Do any of these conclusions sound familiar? What will you and your team learn from the 2020 disruption of COVID-19?

As you reflect on the impact of COVID-19 on your school and/or district, ask yourself these questions:

- ✓ As a school or district, what lessons have we learned?
- ✓ How can I listen, learn, and evaluate information I gain from those stakeholders who are most impacted (students, teachers, parents) by the disruption of the pandemic?
- ✓ How will I capture their input on what has influenced them and how it has changed their vision of teaching, learning, and the classroom environment?

By answering the questions above, you have identified a few educational shifts in your own school. The next chapters of this eBook are designed as a workbook to help you and your team connect the dots and design the educational experiences for students and staff returning to a post-COVID school.

For more inspiration, watch this [TED Talks](#) by Nora Flanagan, a teacher in Chicago, Illinois. Flanagan shares with you her perspective on how schools should respond to COVID-19.

Notes:

[illegible]

2

HOW STUDENT LEARNING WILL EVOLVE

In a post-COVID-19 environment, how will the landscape change? This disruption has created a time for teaching and learning to be in flux regarding **how, what, when, and where** we provide high-quality learning experiences for students in a post-COVID-19 environment.

As schools re-think and build back classrooms to meet today's needs, it is important we are **mindful** not to move backwards or neglect the best practices we have learned thus far. We must continue to learn from what is happening and **embrace the shifts** occurring in teaching, learning, and how school environments need to support student engagement and achievement.

When and where will students learn?

Operating with limited guidelines, school leaders are working to understand when and where to provide the best learning opportunities for their students. May it be in-person, socially distanced environments, hybrid environments (home-to-school and school-to-home), or having students receive all instruction from home in a

virtual environment, the flexibility in **when** and **where** students are learning is increasingly more diversified.

Overall, the data is conflicting.

While most recent reports in the U.S. indicate that remote and hybrid learning has been an ultimate failure, some research has proven pockets of success. Two thought leaders, Natalie Wexler and Nora Fleming, have provided various (and unique) reasons for how different student populations are thriving in remote settings.

Here are a few key ideas:

- ✓ Students that were reluctant to share answers in a classroom environment with their peers feel safer responding through a technology polling function.

- ✓ The home environment may have fewer distractions, which means students are better able to focus on recorded video lessons provided by their teachers. Additionally, another added benefit is students gain access to the learning material whenever they need it.
- ✓ Students have more flexibility during their day, which gives them ownership of their learning. When students have the freedom to establish their own schedules, they can control their sleep needs, participate in physical activity, and take breaks when they need to.
- ✓ Due to reduced assignment workloads, cancelled afterschool programs, and less social events, students are finding more time to focus on their academic work.



The Challenges of Remote Learning on Student Success

Despite all these benefits, one of the biggest concerns for students forced into remote learning is the disparity of equitable learning resources throughout schools in the U.S.

Many districts faced:

- ✓ a lack of technology devices, which meant some students did not have access to a computer or tablet to participate in online learning.
- ✓ weak or non-existent home internet.
- ✓ limited access to online learning materials.
- ✓ inability to train teachers how to teach online.
- ✓ using an ill-equipped online management system.

All these factors (and more) negatively impacted some students' remote learning experience.

The good news is, more resources are becoming available to districts, which is helping to level the playing field for students around the country. Districts are spending more money acquiring the learning materials needed to provide continuous, meaningful, and relevant instruction to all students. Students are increasingly gaining the materials they need to become more accustomed to learning on virtual and remote platforms.

As students become more comfortable with using technology and parents continue to make arrangements for their children to be successful learning remotely, will the movement between learning environments (home to school) become more fluid? Will parents be able to choose where and when their students learn?

As we navigate what defines the optimal learning environment, we must also focus on what is best for our students. Whether they are at a desk in a classroom or are at home at their kitchen table, we must enable them to find success **when** and **where** they are at.

Think about these critical questions:

- ✓ Do we have the resources to provide the best remote and in-person learning experiences for our students?
- ✓ What experiences are important in the school setting?
- ✓ What experiences are important in a remote setting?
- ✓ Connect the dots: How will we address the shift in how the learning environment functions? How will we provide students the adaptability they need to learn anywhere, at any time?

Notes:

[illegible]

What will students learn?

While we know that content and curriculum, along with standards and outcomes are critical in students' learning and development, what we are discovering from the forced remote-learning experience is the importance and value of connecting the academic, cognitive, and social and emotional growth of learners.

It is more important than ever that we break down **what** we teach and infuse it with critical life skills that are essential to students' future success. We all have concerns about the lasting effects the disruption of COVID-19 will have on children. This includes the challenges ahead as we address the academic loss and the impact the isolation has had on students' social and emotional health.

On the brink of burnout, teachers will tell you that the challenge is **real**. Motivating and encouraging students through remote learning and isolated environments feels impossible. Evaluating what content is essential to teach to maintain the progression of skills, teachers are struggling with balancing curriculum demands and meeting the social and emotional needs of their students. Whether learning remotely or returning to in-person, how can we best help our students learn?

How are some schools making it work?

In the article, [“How Schools are Meeting Social-Emotional Needs during the Pandemic”](#), the team highlights their research and the factors that show the relationship between school culture, social-emotional competencies, and academic outcomes. It is important to note that even during a pandemic and remote learning, schools are finding ways to innovate their curriculum to meet the needs of their students.

Think about these critical questions:

- ✓ What is the balance between content and social emotional learning?
- ✓ How do we redesign curriculum and expectations for learning to embrace our student's social emotional health?
- ✓ How will our learning environments function to support students' wellness? interpersonal skills?
- ✓ Connect the dots: How can our learning environments support the social emotional health of our students?

Notes:

[illegible]

How will students learn?

As we continue down this path, we are discovering more and more what learning experiences are working and which ones are not working in the remote and hybrid settings. Whether it is curriculum delivered through technology or worksheets printed out and delivered to student homes; collaborative chat rooms or project based presentations; video recorded lectures or one-on-one teacher student phone calls; online assessments or students snapping photos of completed work, teachers are exhausting every avenue to keep students engaged and learning.

We have learned that the one-stop-shop approach is not an effective delivery or instructional model. The hour-long Zoom class times with the teacher lecturing quickly taught us students can and will disengage. Instead of putting their heads down on the desks or asking to leave the room, students are able to disconnect and turn off their camera when they are passively learning. Just like in the classroom setting, behavior management is an issue and is showing us how critical it is to have students actively involved in their learning.

So how are some making it work?

Reports across the country (2020, Wexler)
are showing that programs built around
individualized, self-paced, active, collaborative

and student-centered learning experiences are proving more successful. Levels of engagement are up and students are present. As well, parents are more content with the quality of their child's education. So what does this mean as we look at how we will teach as we return to the classroom setting?

Think about these critical questions:

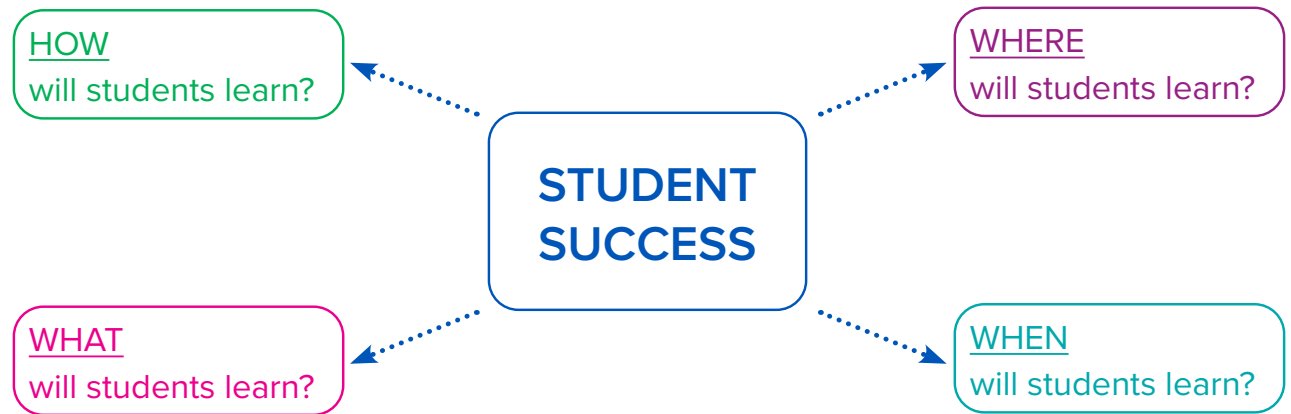
- ✓ What lessons have we learned from student engagement and participation in remote and hybrid learning environments?
- ✓ Are personalized learning opportunities through technology-infused lessons the way we need to differentiate what we learn from home and what we learn in-person?
- ✓ How do we prepare lessons and instruct students in both remote and in-person settings?
- ✓ Connect the dots: How do we create learning environments that will support personalized learning for students?

Notes:

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HOW, WHAT, WHERE, AND WHEN STUDENTS LEARN

Bring a team together and use this guide to start the dialogue on how you can visualize students' success in a post-COVID-19 environment.



VISUALIZING STUDENT SUCCESS

Connect the dots between teaching, student learning, and the learning environments.

HOW will students learn?

Teaching Strategies, Instruction Model, Classroom Systems

WHAT will students learn?

Content, Curriculum, Standards, Social-Emotional Learning

WHERE will students learn?

Classrooms, Media Centers, Makerspace, Learning Labs, Common Areas

WHEN will students learn?

Minutes in the day, Blended Learning, Flipped Classrooms, Homework

3

HOW TO FOSTER STUDENT LEARNING IN A POST-COVID-19 WORLD

Recapping educational best practices prior to the disruption of COVID-19

Education in the United States has been under review for quite a while. In fact, extensive educational research is focused on how to:

- ✓ reduce passive learning.
- ✓ improve student engagement.
- ✓ successfully implement technology.
- ✓ eliminate the one-size-fits-all instruction approach.

Schools are challenged to create student-centered learning environments that are comfortable, collaborative, and creative (Hanover, 2017).

[\(For more on this, click here.\)](#)

In the last 15 years, we have seen promising outcomes in student achievement when children, from all ages, are given the opportunity to:

- ✓ collaborate with their peers and teachers.
- ✓ actively participate in the content.
- ✓ gain access to personalized lessons.
- ✓ experience the flexibility to learn anywhere, at anytime.

Now, what do we do?

Students are suffering from depression, anxiety, and cognitive loss at the highest level we have ever seen in the U.S. The immediate isolation and absence of social interaction with teachers, peers, coaches, counselors, and other influential adults has had an immediate impact on students and will also have a lasting impact on this generation of students. Even when students

returned to in-person learning, they continue to face social distancing, different teaching staff, contact tracing, and continual movement in and out of school.

Let's connect the dots!

- ✓ How do we take what we have learned and apply it to what research tells us is best practice to address the effects COVID-19 has placed upon our students?
- ✓ How do we create well designed student-centered learning environments to help our students transition back to in person learning and support them today and into the future?

VERBAL COMBINATION
PHYSICAL/KINAESTHETIC
SOCIAL
VISUAL
MUSICAL/AUDITORY
LOGICAL/MATHEMATICAL
SOLITARY

MEETING DIVERSE STUDENT LEARNING NEEDS THROUGH STUDENT-CENTERED LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Provide extremely enriching learning experiences for learners by identifying their preferred **learning style**.

Use Technology to Engage Learners

[Personalizing](#) students' learning enables them to connect with content by giving them the ability to explore personal interests or to demonstrate learning based upon their own needs. This is far different from receiving instruction through a standard, paced curriculum, or a one-size-fits-all instructional model. Let's evaluate the benefits of adding technology as a tool to meet students' diverse needs.

Blending technology into curriculum creates the flexibility for students to consume material in-class, in a collaborative center, in small groups or at home, anywhere and at any time. Giving students a choice through designed lesson planning can help provide them with personalized learning experiences in various areas, from project-based learning, to the SEL (social emotional learning) skills of organization and cognitive awareness.

Hands-on Learning is Good for the Brain

Educational research has also proven that having students [actively](#) participate in their learning rather than through passive learning improves engagement, and most importantly student outcomes (Hanover, 2017). We have learned through recent studies on the brain that active learning stimulates the brain to process material through cognitive and sensory channels,

helping students acquire and store information more easily.

Incorporating curriculum such as STEM and STEAM learning activities helps students analyze, discuss, apply, and design their understanding. Encouraging students who are returning from a long hiatus learning remotely by transitioning them to a setting that allows them to explore alternative solutions and thoughtfully solve problems together will increase the chance of recovering academic loss they may have suffered.

Let Students Interact

Planning how students [collaborate](#) in virtual and in-person settings should be strategic and thoughtful. Students will need to be evaluated to assess their social and emotional health.

Surveys, emotional check-in charts, student self-assessments, and building a rapport with students will be even more essential to support our planning of SEL strategies. Educators need to allocate classroom time to allow students to interact and build interpersonal skills through structured classroom activities. And even more importantly, build in less structured time to allow students to practice and develop these types of skills. Allowing students the ability to collaborate gives them the opportunity to learn important social and emotional skills, such as [social](#), [interpersonal](#) and [emotional processing](#).



Scan or click
to read more.



4

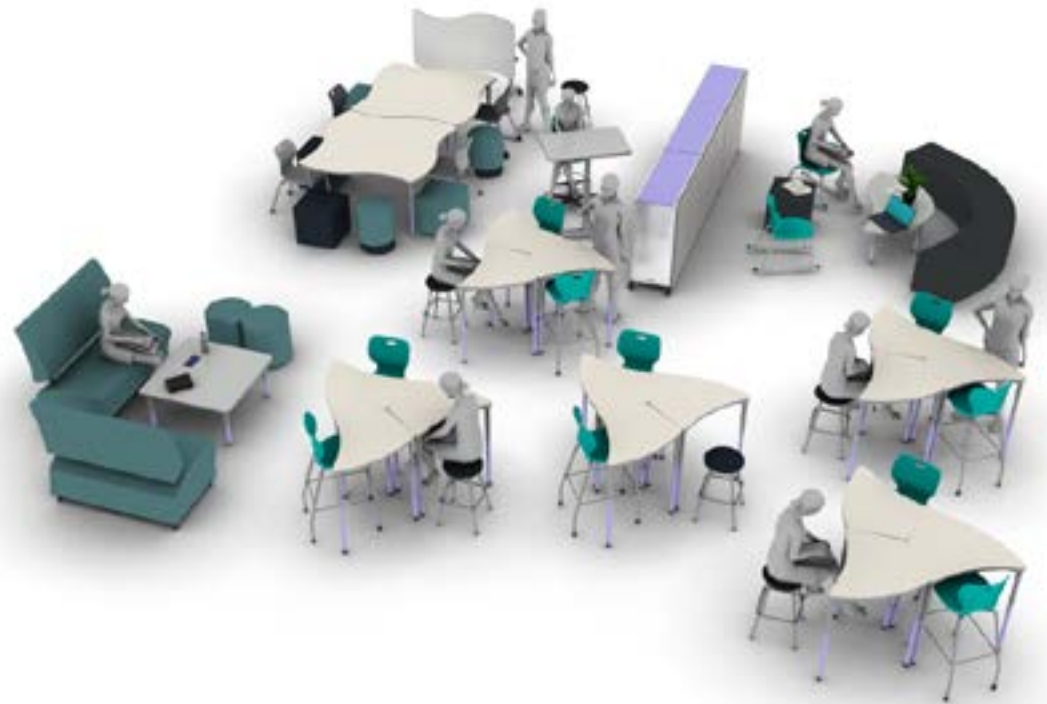
COMPONENTS OF WELL-DESIGNED LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

As we continue to shift our thinking toward the future, not only do we need to re-envision how we teach, but also how the environments in which we teach function. Classrooms of yesteryear, designed to support the industrial age, are not adequate as we prepare the workforce for tomorrow and future generations. We need to create inclusive, equitable, and supportive learning environments that are adaptable based on student needs.

In this chapter, we will break down the following learning environments:

- ✓ Active
- ✓ Personalized
- ✓ Collaborative

We will also identify when to use each of these learning environments to best serve your students and provide you with helpful visuals to get you started with your own inspirational classroom design.



KEY ELEMENTS

Active learning environments are flexible, adaptable, and durable with the ability to meet the demands of movement and reconfiguration.



A CLOSER LOOK AT ACTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Active Learning **engages** students in the learning process, and it requires them to be responsible for their cognitive development.

Consider the following key points when designing an active learning environment in your school:

- ✓ Active learning environments enable multiple activities to take place throughout the room.
- ✓ Furniture can be moved by teachers or students as needed, depending on the activity.
- ✓ Creating different learning zones throughout your room will help teachers and students delineate the space and actively support classroom management and student engagement.



STUDENT SEATING	TEACHER WORKSURFACES
☐ Yes ☐ No Ideas:	☐ Yes ☐ No Ideas:



Use this space to capture your ideas.

CURRICULUM AND CONTENT

Will this furniture support our vision for what the students will learn?

KEY ELEMENTS

Configure the environment for students to reflect, reinforce concepts, and assess skills based on their individual needs.



A CLOSER LOOK AT PERSONALIZED LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Learning environments that are **comfortable** and **managed by students**.

Consider the following keys to a successful personalized learning environment:

- ✓ These types of spaces accommodate the various tools students need to work on personalized learning and project-based activities, specifically technology.
- ✓ Furniture and space should be multi-functional, configurable, and mobile.
- ✓ Spaces need to accommodate the fluidity of movement while in the room, from room to room, as well as when students transition between school and home.
- ✓ Personalized learning environments should allow student movement, whether that is sitting or standing.



STUDENT WORKSURFACES	MOBILE STORAGE
☐ Yes ☐ No Ideas:	☐ Yes ☐ No Ideas:



Use this space to capture your ideas.

TEACHING STRATEGIES

Will this furniture support our vision for teaching and learning?

KEY ELEMENTS

Flexible spaces create different zones to enhance or differentiate learning.



A CLOSER LOOK AT COLLABORATIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Collaborative learning environments are **inclusive, shared, and risk-free spaces**, almost mimicking home environments.

Consider the following key characteristics of a collaborative learning environment:

- ✓ Safe and secure areas encourage students to better engage and connect with their peers and teachers.
- ✓ Collaborative spaces should support students making eye contact with each other, which is critical in their social and emotional development.
- ✓ Collaborative learning environments should accommodate various groupings: students in pairs, students in quads, students in a round of nine, and everything in between.



Use this space to capture your ideas.

MOBILE STORAGE	STUDENT WORKSURFACES
☐ Yes ☐ No Ideas:	☐ Yes ☐ No Ideas:



LEARNING ENVIRONMENT FUNCTION

Will this furniture support our vision for where our students will learn?

5

THE FUTURE OF CLASSROOM LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

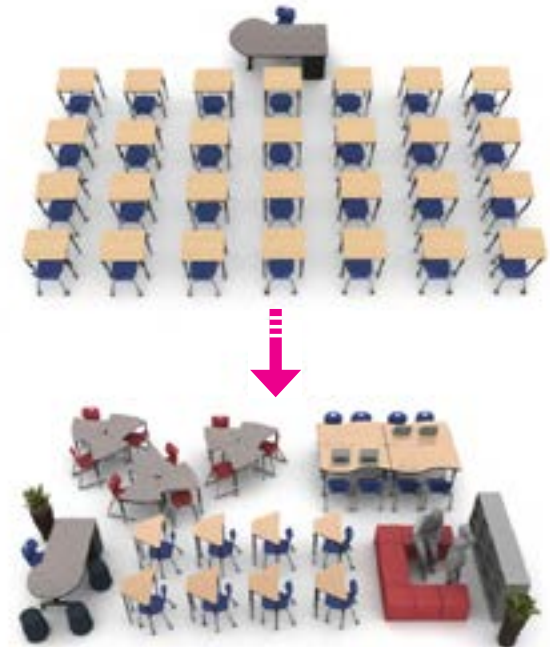
Now, more than ever, students will need learning environments that are **well balanced** (collaborative, active, and personalized) so they can better engage, participate, and connect with their peers, teachers, and content.

During this time of uncertainty and disruption, we have an opportunity to redefine student success by evaluating the **where, when, how, and what** our students experience and apply it to designing learning environments that will support teaching and learning. It is important that we listen to students, teachers, parents, and all stakeholders that have been impacted by this disruption and clearly articulate what we have learned and what should shift in our thinking and practice. We need to understand how to connect the dots between learning environments and the impact they have on teaching, learning, and the people that interact in those areas.

Consider the following questions:

- ✓ Can we shift our thoughts of learning environments as places that function as individual spaces governed by one instructor?
- ✓ Can we re-envision spaces as more than just a place for desks and chairs?
- ✓ Can we rethink learning environments as more than spaces for teachers to conduct their work and students to acquire knowledge?
- ✓ Can we re-imagine the function of classrooms? Open inviting environments that welcomes the inclusion of all students. Comfortable spaces that help students feel secure and safe.

RETHINK YOUR SPACE



This is the right time to shift our thinking to:

- ✓ collaborative environments that allow students to interact, support, engage, with each other and their teachers.
- ✓ personalized environments to inspire, encourage, and support the social and emotional well-being of students.
- ✓ active environments that are fluid and provide opportunities for students to engage with content anywhere and at anytime.

Design your future classrooms. Turn your vision into a reality.

Use these layouts below to brainstorm your vision of flexible, adaptable, durable, comfortable, creative, inclusive, coordinated, shared, and risk-free environments.

For more inspiration:

[Designing Places for Learning](#)

For more information, watch this TED Talks from architect Danish Kurani where he describes how intentional planning of a learning space can help teachers and students perform better. He highlights the importance of training teachers how to use the space and get the most out of the space.



CONCLUSION

Every day we learn more about how the disruption of COVID-19 has impacted our students and schools. Even more, we are learning how the disruption will influence the future of teaching and learning. The act of sending students home to learn remotely and bringing them back to in-person learning shifts daily and continues to disrupt the defined practices of our educational system.

In the article [“Covid-19’s Impact on Students’ Academic and Mental Well-Being”](#) (Terada, 2020), the author reinforces the idea that schools will be facing more challenges due to the disruption of COVID-19. Terada points out schools are going to have to address:

- ✓ the widening learning gaps that happened due to remote learning and the learning loss all students experienced.
- ✓ the disproportionate quality of education for students living in poverty and the impact of students lacking access to remote learning resources.
- ✓ the varying effects this disruption had on students’ social and emotional health.

As we continue to move forward, we need to be mindful of how the disruption impacted our students, families, and staff. We need to plan

accordingly and update teaching and learning practices to best meet the needs of our students as they return to in-person learning. We are obligated to connect the dots between teaching, learning and the environments our students and teachers encounter every day. We must design learning experiences that will prepare our students for today, tomorrow and into the future.

Knowing what we know now and being mindful there is more to learn, this is the right time to make the shift and rethink and redesign the when, where, how and what our students experience in their classrooms. It is imperative we connect the dots.

Let us remove the entrenched systems that are proven to be ineffective in student engagement and move toward building collaborative, active and personalized learning environments for students!

Contact the [Director of Learning Environments](#) to receive a download of the collaborative planning tool kit for all resources.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Patricia Cadigan, M.Ed

Director of Learning Environments



After 28 years in public education, Patricia Cadigan joined the Artcobell team as the Director of Learning Environments. Her passion for helping school leaders create engaging learning environments to support student success transcends her love for student learning.

As a school administrator for 18 years at the elementary, middle and high school levels, she observed and supported the many ways teachers teach and learners learn. But as each year clicked along, it was apparent there was a growing divide between student engagement and the delivery of content and relevant resources. Every year, it was a challenge to figure out why the best practices we had used for years in education were not holding true with today's students.

In her last assignment as a bond director, Patricia was asked to transform learning environments to meet the needs of students, teachers and the demands of changing curriculum and teaching strategies. She had to connect the dots between teaching, learning, and resources in the classroom. Even though the work was challenging, she learned firsthand that the design of a classroom truly makes a difference in how teachers teach and how students learn.

Now in her role at Artcobell, she is committed to bringing her experiences and her continued research to help schools reimagine their vision of next generation spaces. Coupled with professional development and planning workshops, Patricia “talks the talk” of schools to let them drive their decisions on how, what, when and where teaching and learning occurs in their schools.

To contact Patricia, email her at pcadigan@artcobell.com or connect on [LinkedIn](#)

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RESOURCES

Page 5 How Schools Should Respond to COVID-19 - Nora Flanagan- Teacher

https://www.ted.com/talks/nora_flanagan_how_schools_should_respond_to_covid_19

Page 16 Modern Classrooms - Greg Whiteley - Filmmaker

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VTxYSy7h9MM>

Page 18 Designing Places for Learning - Danish Kurani - Architect

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nbOFJus1wXM>

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