

# Learning Environments

<http://smart-thinking.weebly.com/learning-environments.html>



**The Camp Fire** is where we share knowledge and information with others. This is about preserving knowledge and, in the past, where technologies for encoding information (such as writing, books and, now, the Internet) were not developed, this was an essential means of ensuring that essential information was not lost to the community, that it did not, for example, die with one individual. The oral traditions – the stories – of many cultures are the embodiments of their campfires.

## **Campfire**

A place 'where the storyteller ... shared wisdom with students, who, in their turn, become storytellers to the next generation'.

**Campfire** - videos (YouTube, TeacherTube), virtual worlds, videoconferencing, Skype, transmedia texts (including interactive narratives like Inanimate Alice).



**The Watering Hole** is where creative discussions take place. Information does not exist in a vacuum – we have to make sense of it, put it into a context. The same data can mean different things to different groups at different times and, in the end, the sense made of all knowledge is contingent on time and place. We are social animals and so the watering hole is a place where we explore knowledge in the context of the community.

## **Watering hole**

A place 'where we learn from our peers ... each participant at the watering hole is both learner and teacher at the same time'.

**Watering hole** - social networking (Twitter, facebook, Google +), Wikis, Google Docs for collaboration, multi-player games, virtual worlds.



Although we are social animals, we also need time alone. **The Caves** is a place where we retire to construct meaning for ourselves. It is a place of solitude and reflection, where we go inside and synthesize the information to which we have been exposed.

## **Cave**

A place where learners 'isolate themselves from others in order to gain special insights'.

**Cave** - blogs for reflection, interactive learning aids, single-player games, the web itself for independent research.



**The Mountain top** is where we publicly demonstrate our knowledge and understanding. This is a 'peak experience,' where we demonstrate mastery and teach others in the community and beyond.

# Designed to learn

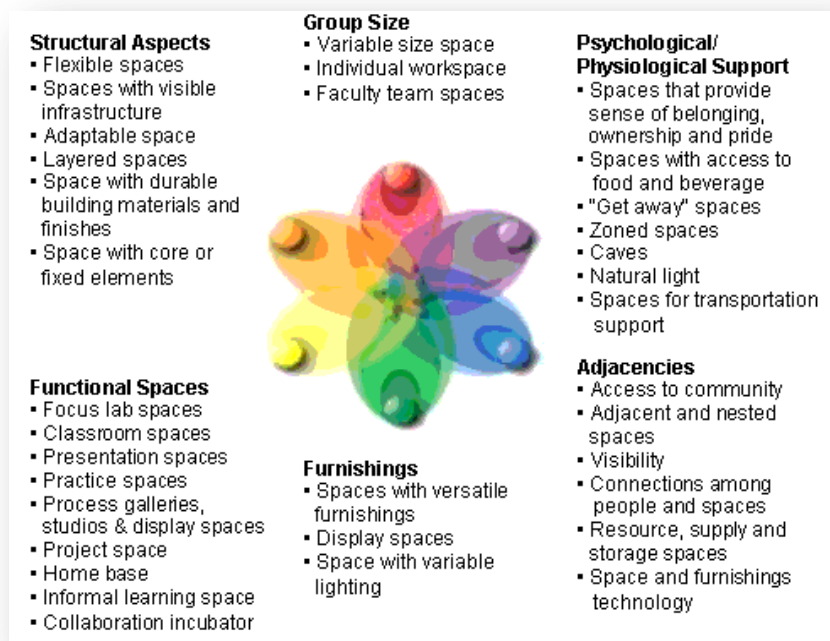
Using Thornburg's ideas of 'learning spaces,' it is easy to see how making some changes to the way we think about learning and how we set up environments for our kids to learn can make a difference to the quality of educational outcomes. *David Thornburg on the Evolving Classroom (Big Thinkers Series)*

*We need to develop whole-school approach so that we have a common language which colleagues and students can use when talking about the new learning spaces. In this regard, I propose we adopt the terminology of 'caves, waterholes, campfires and mountaintops', (as inspired by Dr. David Thornburg\*).*

*\*Dr David Thornburg first offered the theory of these four 'primordial learning spaces' in 2004. His paper in the International Journal for Instructional Technology and Distance Learning suggested, "The four spaces are used to create an educational system geared to the needs of learners and educators."*

## Key Features of Proposed Learning Environment

- ▶ Learning space design to facilitate a more project/inquiry-based learning pedagogy - teachers as facilitators, students as lifelong learners.
- ▶ Less desks = more space and flexibility.
- ▶ Choice of seating offered to students.
- ▶ Different levels of seating (high, med, low), for diverse learning styles.
- ▶ Writable surfaces.
- ▶ Colour and tactile surfaces.
- ▶ Learning environments should be flexible, adaptable and stimulating.



# 8 Tips and Tricks to Redesign Your Classroom

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*Editor's Note: Author David Bill is a designer and educator who consulted with [The Third Teacher+](#) on the Remake Your Class project highlighted in the videos below. The tips in this post go along with the companion video. We are excited by the simplicity (and low price tag!) of this great redesign. Hope you'll share any of your own tips in the comments area below.*

If you're thinking of completing your own classroom remake project, good for you. I have been helping teachers redesign classroom spaces for the past three years, and have seen this process work for projects of all sizes.

The tips below can be used for smaller scale remakes right way. If you want to do something bigger, you can start planning immediately and schedule some time over a holiday or long weekend. Either way, much of the prep work can be done now, and incrementally over a few weeks as a lead-up to a larger remake project.

Whether you are looking to reorganize one corner or redesign the entire room, here are eight tips that may help you throughout the process.

## 1. Get Students Involved

Students are your primary users and should be at the center of such a remake process. To begin building excitement, reach out to them early and invite them to a weekend session at school (or someone's garage) where they can be involved from the beginning. Here are some specific ways to involve students:

### Create Visual Inspiration

Ask parents, colleagues or friends to donate a variety of appropriate magazines. Have students find and add magazine pictures to create a visual wall of spatial inspiration. The pictures can portray any space at all -- not just schools. The goal is to include any and all places that stand out for students. When complete, have them use sticky dots to indicate the places that stand out and why. If you're strapped for time, find and post the images yourself.

Digitally, you can utilize [Pinterest](#) as a way for to create a "board" of inspiration. As you or your students find items or spaces that stand out, they can be pinned to your board. Students then comment on the "pins" that they appreciate.

### Students Define Pain Points

Is there anything unsatisfying about the present setup? To find out, use a whiteboard to draw a map of your current classroom, and visually identify the various sections. Students then use sticky notes to write a word or two that indicates how they feel or what types of actions take place while spending time in that section of the classroom.

### 10X10X10

With the students, define several questions that address your classroom remake project. Then have students talk with ten different people in ten different places and bring ten different stories. Use that research to provide insights into what spaces people like and why.

## Student Helpers

Later, when you're building out your redesign, ensure that the students play various roles in building the actual room. Whether it's painting, putting casters on tables, or moving boxes, the more they are involved, the more ownership and pride they will take in the classroom.

## 2. Research and Brainstorming Methods

You don't need to be a "designer" to engage in this process. All you need is the ability to conduct the research and do the brainstorming that is essential to this process. When remaking your classroom, the first step is to define the right "need" and then ask the right questions.

For example, when defining your need, you might ask, "How could we create more collaborative space in our classroom?" As you identify needs, activities like those mentioned below will help you collect data and then examine the challenge through a different perspective.

### Word Association

Place butcher paper on several tables. Break the participants into several groups with each group at a separate table. Write a different random word in the center of each piece of butcher paper. Based upon that initial word, have the individuals write the first word that comes to their mind, and then repeat the process for each subsequent word. Do this for a few minutes. The table participants should then rotate and quickly build upon their group members' words. Once that is completed, have the group select their two favorite words. Those two words must then be used to create a quick prototype that addresses the stated "need."

### Classroom Flow

Find a colleague or student who has a free period when you teach, and ask him or her to come and observe how you and your students move about the classroom. Print a diagram of the classroom, and as your observer watches, have him or her draw where you and your students move. One color should be used for tracing your movement and another for the students' movement. The sheet of paper with the tracking will help you determine what areas are used most heavily, and where items should be placed to better support fluid movement throughout your class.

### Sticky Notes

After conducting your initial research, determine the areas that need the most focus (e.g. clutter, collaborative space and teacher workspace). For each focal point, have participants draw or write an idea related to the topic on sticky note. The ideas should be posted on a whiteboard. When all the ideas are on the board, they should be sorted and grouped to determine which ideas overlap and which can move forward. These brainstorming [rules](#) and [guidelines](#) will be helpful in setting up such an experience.

## 3. Tips for Organizing and Managing Volunteers

When assigning tasks and responsibilities to your volunteers, use something very simple. If the various individuals and groups helping you remake your classroom have regular online access, use a Google spreadsheet. If access is problematic, create a printable spreadsheet with the tasks and responsibilities, and pass it out to all parties involved in the project. The key to such a process is ensuring that it's easy to identify and know who is handling each task and responsibility.

## 4. Tips for Clearing the Clutter

One of the keys to any classroom remake is removing all of the unnecessary items. Spend some time considering what you most frequently use and where those items should be in relation to where you spend most of your time while in class. Once you define those needs, begin to search sites like [Lifehacker](#) for some tips on how to reorganize your materials.

## 5. Tips for Obtaining Supplies and Support

Once you've defined your required materials for the remake, reach out to your locally owned stores and tell your story. In many cases, the owners may donate or discount certain supplies. And -- oh, by the way -- it wouldn't hurt to bring a few of your students when you are making the ask.

If your project is going to require a bit more money, an [Indiegogo](#) campaign may be a viable option. Partner with some of the students and perhaps your media teacher to create a video that will draw in some interest and support.

## 6. Ideas for Repurposing Materials You May Already Have

Many items in our classrooms and homes are sitting idle when they could easily be repurposed. Do you have old plastic containers from the grocery store, milk crates or old hardbound books? Use them as storage containers in your classroom. Have old CDs? Make them into [art](#). Lacking inspiration? Again, [Pinterest](#) may be a great resource for how to reuse your materials in your classroom. If you can't find the types of materials you're looking for to organize things, your town or city may have a group like [SCRAP](#), [Urban Ore](#) or [Goodwill](#). Check out those locations, as they will have plenty of reused materials. Also, explore [Craigslist](#), a veritable goldmine for used materials.

## 7. Organizing Your Tools

Organize your tools in groupings based upon usage and frequency. Consider using containers or boxes that you or your students can easily identify and access, as these will be two of your biggest concerns. Use some color and visual labels to ensure that the containers stand out. If there are doors on your cabinets, consider taking them off so that everyone can see the containers with ease.

## 8. Additional Resources

- [School Architecture Projects](#): a series of schools built by the Danish architect Rosan Bosch.
- [Make Space](#): a book by Scott Dorley and Scott Witthoft of Stanford's d.school.
- [An Informational Guide to Young Children's Outdoor Play Spaces](#) [PDF]: a guide to designing play spaces that support the development of young children
- [Classroom Architect](#)
- [Get Inspired](#): a resource bank for creating unique spaces, and a web page offering students and teachers the chance to outline their classroom floor plan.
- [Teaching in Spaces Research on Learning Spaces](#): ideas from Stanford professors on how they use learning spaces to enhance their teaching.
- [Learning Spaces Toolkit](#): a toolkit to help design and maintain 21st century informal learning spaces from the North Carolina State University.
- [Organizations that Support Re-using Materials](#)
- Organizations that offer materials and suggestions for reusing materials.

You can do a lot with space, materials, and even your students when you think creatively. In the comments section below, please share any questions, ideas and experiences for how you might remake your classroom this year.

[Learn more about San Francisco's Roosevelt Middle School and the volunteers and organizations](#) who participated in the Remake Your Class project.

[David Bill's Profile](#)

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A large amount of a child's time is spent sitting in a school classroom. This place is where they will learn the various skills deemed necessary and proper for them to achieve success in the global society. The classroom is where they will gain an understanding of their place in the world and the gifts that they have to offer it. It is where the student develops what they want their future to look like, as well as knowledge of the skills needed to reach that goal.

With the classroom being such an important place in the growth of a child it is important to understand the ways in which to affect this environment in order to receive maximum effectiveness in instruction. If schools really do play a large role in teaching the next generation how to be successful members of society then every precaution should be taken to make sure that the learning environment is one that helps students thrive.