

SPACE: THE

A leading tech advocate imagines a media



BY ALAN NOVEMBER

Pat Kyle, librarian at the Washington International School (WIS), was presented with a rare opportunity. A private PreK–12 institution in northwest Washington, DC, WIS had committed to a five-year redesign of the school in which she would take an active role, helping build a brand new media center.

Having participated in a design workshop at my Building Learning Communities Summer Conference (www.novemberlearning.com/blc) last year, Kyle understood how a properly designed space, one that thoughtfully integrated online learning and collaboration and content creation among students,

would serve the entire school community well into the future. So she invited me to meet with her, school administrators, and their architect in what was an exciting opportunity for me to get in on building a true 21st century school.

When I looked at the existing plans, I saw a fairly traditional library, with the

usual configuration of bookshelves and a central circulation desk. An adjacent classroom accommodated teachers and students, who came in to do research using laptops on mobile carts. As I have frequently seen in school construction plans, it was a new, old library. Despite the presence of technology, it wasn't quite the ideal space for helping students develop the skills necessary for functioning in a digital, global economy.

I encouraged Kyle and her colleagues to imagine their library in 10 years, because if they design for today, they would already be behind. As you look critically at your own spaces, consider the future impact of technology.

The massive shift from paper as the dominant media to digital content will continue. So will the move toward online learning, student collaboration on a local and global scale, and self-produced content, all of which demand reconfiguration of the learning landscape. Challenges, yes, but ones that also present unique opportunity for media specialists, who are positioned to lead the way in transforming their schools.

LEARNING GOES ONLINE

Stanford University offers a K–12 online learning program, and Michigan has plans to require all graduating high school students to complete a certain amount of coursework via the Web. Online learning is set to explode. Schools will need to address ways of working with students who are becoming more individualized in their own learning and, at the same time, more collaborative.

What libraries can offer are intimate spaces for online learning. Students will need semi-private spaces or kiosks, where they can log onto their courses. It is within

Illustrations by David Brion.

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center fit for 21st century learning

these learning spaces—with the help of talented media specialists—where students can learn to be self-directed.

As learning becomes more personalized and individually designed, it will be even more important to provide social spaces where students can work together to derive meaning from their online experience. In a way, we are revisiting the Socratic method. Socrates was a great believer in the dialogue between students and teacher. At WIS, they will have the traditional oval table where students can sit facing their teacher and peers in order to exchange ideas. Let the dialogue begin!

CONNECTING GLOBALLY

Powerful communication tools, particularly videoconferencing, are gaining prominence in forward-thinking schools. At WIS, we devised a collaboration center that includes a long conference table with a plasma screen at one end. Within



spaces like these, it will be important for librarians to teach students how to responsibly and safely connect with others around the world. Through Web-based programs such as ePALS, you and your students can communicate with classrooms in India, China, Australia, and numerous other countries. Skype, and other software, makes it easy to make these connections for free through online audio and videoconferencing.

A DESIGN STUDIO

Perhaps most exciting of all is the prospect of students creating and publishing content in the library space. Whether on their own or in collaboration with others, kids must practice these skills, so essential to succeeding in a global economy. Design studios are where this can happen. So why not accommodate this element? It will very likely make your library the coolest spot in school.

WIS has planned for multiple, small studios surrounded by soundproof glass walls. There, students can work alone or in groups before, during, and after

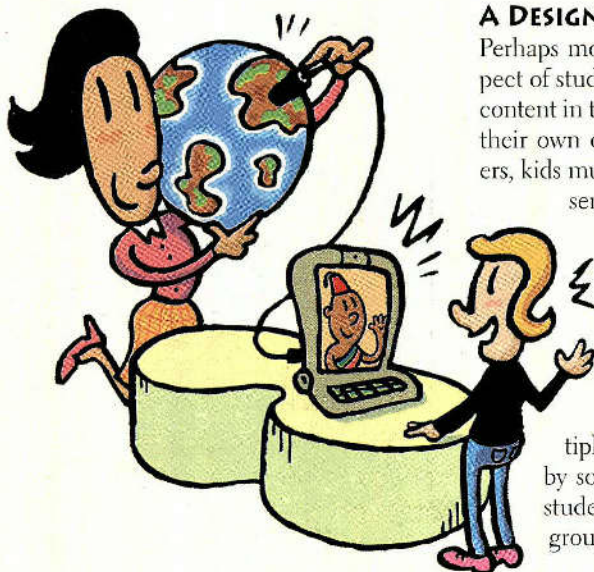
school to create podcasts, direct and produce video productions, and most importantly, expand their personal boundaries of learning.

We recognized a related need for a space where other students and the community can come together to become engaged with the student presenters. The resulting community space is simply an open area that can be converted to accommodate various presentations. A screen and LCD projector will come down from the ceiling as needed and various inputs and outputs will be readily accessible to accommodate any type of media presentation.

I'm not suggesting that libraries do away with bookshelves and the circulation desk. But over time, we will not need as much shelf space. Particularly in light of limited budgets, we need to balance the decline in print resources with the need for more social spaces. Eventually, much of the physical media center, indeed, the school as a whole, will be more heavily devoted to interaction among students, as well as content creation.

Yet a reconfigured space, packed to the brim with all the latest and greatest technology, doesn't guarantee successful learning. It will be the librarian engaging students through personalized instruction, global collaboration opportunities, and creative assignments that will remain absolutely essential.

Alan November is senior partner of November Learning (www.novemberlearning.com).



WIS will break ground on new construction this summer. Stay tuned for updates from Pat Kyle on the progress of her new media center at www.slj.com.



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