

# NEXT-GEN LEARNING SPACES

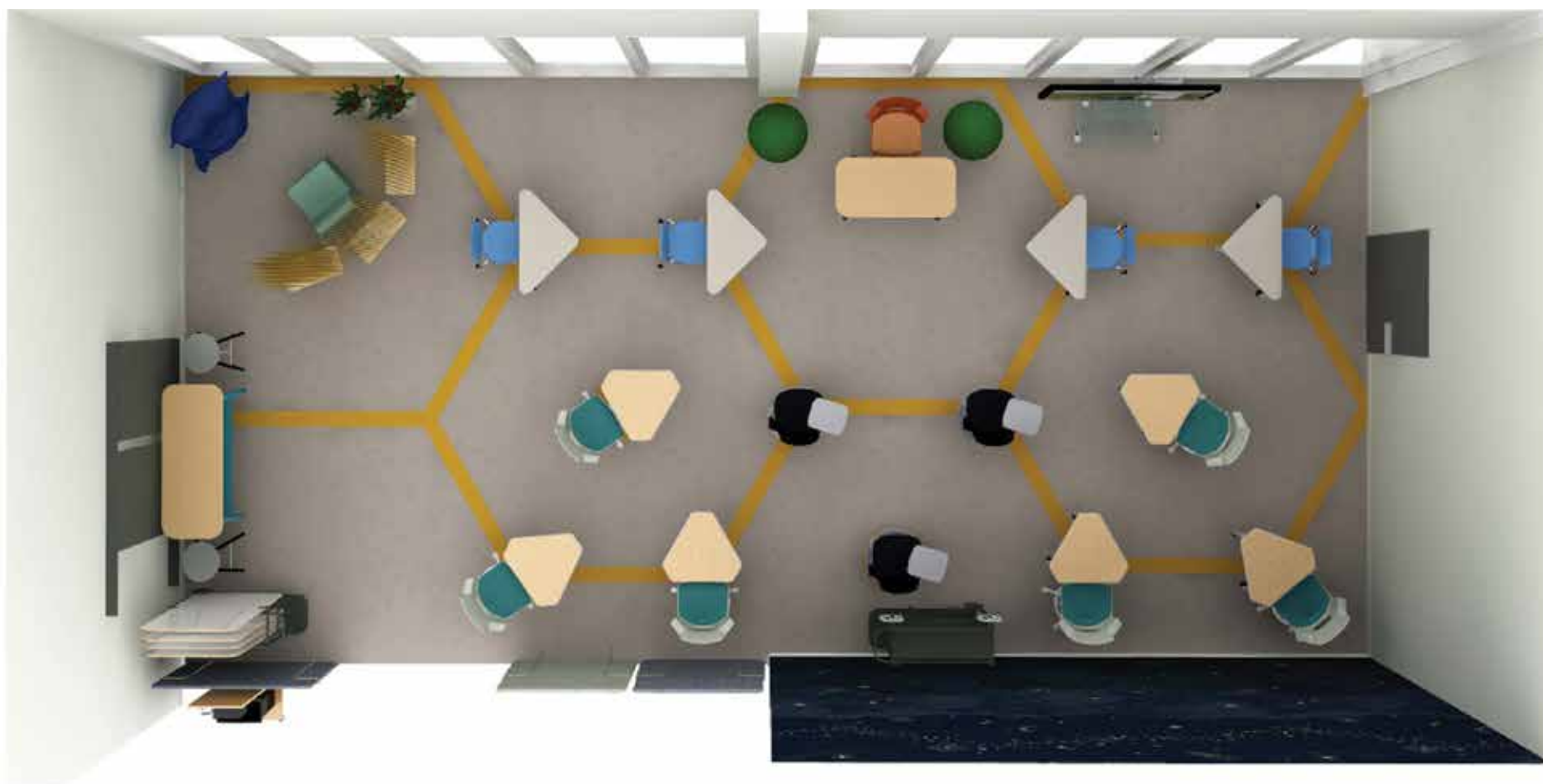


● Hybrid Schooling

● High-Tech Libraries

● Classroom Ecosystems

● Future-Focused High School



In the Hive region classroom ecosystem, students find space that supports their natural drive to socialize and collaborate.

## Maintaining Classroom Culture with Ecosystem-Inspired ‘Regions’

By Kate Rancourt

The coronavirus pandemic has caused massive disruption in education and has exposed many systems and environments that demand change. It has also offered an unprecedented opportunity to reinvent the learning space and design a classroom that better supports student learning. One way to begin this process is by going back to basics and looking to nature for inspiration.

Returning to environments where students and educators feel most at ease means reconnecting them to nature. One new approach to reimagining the learning space begins with the notion of an ecosystem of ‘regions’ to create diversity and deliver the benefits encountered in natural environments. These regions work in unison and bleed into one another based on the needs and requirements of the learners, encouraging autonomous and personalized learning experiences.

Covid-19 certainly presents a challenge, but this framework can still meet students on their level while providing safe and supportive intentional spaces for all students. The zones found in a classroom can be adopted to any learning environment within the greater school campus or even at home where most children are learning right now. A primary objective of Classrooms as Ecosystems is to help students feel autonomy over their environment while strongly connecting with their emotional state.

The Classrooms as Ecosystems model consists of four regions to address the different modes that students move through during a typical day: Exploratory, Hive, Reflective, Restorative. As these zones are re-examined to accommodate social

distancing and distance learning, it can be determined which aspects work for which type of user to effectively transition to the home or any alternate learning environment.

### Harnessing Curiosity

The Exploratory region is about learners harnessing their own curiosity. This area promotes self-discovery through use of tools and kits that engage students in a fun way, and supports play while exploring their new classroom environment, whether at home or in a redesigned classroom. Typical activities can be adapted for the Exploratory region to accommodate our new normal.

- Use of maker materials for students to create their own six-foot distancing tools and adopt them as a metric for students to self-monitor their spacing.
- Create treasure maps of their new classroom or school footprint to help orient students on the new norms and how to navigate their new environment.
- Move their bodies frequently. Get up, stretch, dance, and play games within their six-foot distance. Remember the hokey pokey?
- Create new greetings for classmates and teachers – celebrate being able to connect in a new space even if it is not the expected space
- Host brainstorming activities with students to see what creative ideas they might have for making their spaces feel more fun, curious, and playful.

### Reset and Realign with Purpose

The Restorative region offers a moment to reset and regain a sense of purpose – it suggests a change of location and the use of outdoor space is a perfect opportunity. The added benefit: fresh air and access to

nature both help with cognitive function.

- Use blacktops/parking lots or patios/backyards to mark social distancing with appropriately positioned circles. Provide or have students bring towels or mats and sit in the circles to read, eat or chat with others in their respective circles.

- Hold walking field trips where students pair up and discuss a topic while walking six feet apart. Examples: Students could walk along marked lines on the ground or hold each end of a six-foot pole or stick between them.

- Build in free time where every student chooses what they do quietly in the restorative area – listen to music or podcasts, watch videos, read, draw, paint, or just rest. Use this region as a “reset” button.

### Socialize and Collaborate

In the Hive region, students find space that supports their natural drive to socialize and collaborate. Integral to learning is the ability to work well with others and comfortably be in a space with other students. Finding enough areas to accommodate appropriate social distancing may not be easy for established schools. Think creatively, consider using corridors, gymnasiums and other in-between spaces as learning areas to provide the space to bring in more students. Consider the configuration of the classroom itself to find new ways for students to see each other and visually connect.

- Convert gymnasiums or multi-purpose, theater stage, or shop areas into makeshift or pop-up teaching zones. For homeschooling, consider allocating areas within the house that can accommodate all siblings and/or learning partners.

# Returning to environments where students and educators feel most at ease means reconnecting them to nature.

- Move appropriate furniture into the hallways, corridors, and other in-between spaces for classroom breakouts.

- Orient classroom furniture so students face each other with the teacher in the center of the room, not the front.

Make it easy for students to have eye contact with each other and to see how everyone is doing. If possible, create spaces in the home so children are not isolated.

- Create games where students interact with each other – in person or virtually - that are inherently social, assigning various roles for play or “get to know each other” activities.

### Self-Reflection and Metacognition

With so much change and disruption to the school day, space for self-reflection helps students better understand their own learning styles and what they need from the learning environment. For the Reflective region, might places around the campus or at home be designated for metacognition, for thinking about thinking?

- Create mindfulness areas on campus through marked zones and appropriate seating. Allow students

to create and construct their own makeshift barriers that act as a hint or cue that they desire alone time.

- Use journaling, portable and mobile, to express the learning experience which can be completed at their desk, at home or elsewhere.

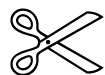
- Use patio or backyard space, a window seat, treehouse or other space that the student doesn't use throughout the day as a designated zone for reflection.

- Use specific scents, lighting control, and music or ambient noise to help with recall and retention.

For educators, Reflective regions are just as important, allowing them to journal, look back on the day and decompress. Everyone needs resources to sustain their mental health with the ever-present stress and uncertainty during this pandemic.

Considering how spaces can support students with their personal learning styles and emotional health, whether at home or at school, requires an approach that is holistic and aspirational. These creative and scalable solutions can help students realize their autonomy over their own learning environment and support educational success.

*Kate Rancourt is associate creative director for One Workplace.*



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