Power of Place Playbook:

An Educator's Guide to Learner-Centered Classroom Design

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Introduction

Creating an agile, student-centered classroom can feel risky and overwhelming. It takes time and bandwidth to develop new structures and routines. It also requires trust in our students to make productive decisions when given more freedom of choice and movement. However, research shows that active student-centered learning environments that are combined with effective pedagogy enhance learner engagement, classroom efficiency, and quality of both teacher and learner experience. Active learning spaces not only lead to significant gains in academic performance but also foster learning experiences that are joyful for teachers and students alike. Afterall, learning should be fun and fulfilling.

The Power of Place Playbook is a guide designed to help you achieve these goals. It is full of tried and true tips that can help you engage your students in deeper learning experiences through your new classroom environment. Use them as-is or tailor them to meet you and your students' most immediate needs and interests.

Design Thinking for Active Learning

Design thinking is a human-centered approach used to unearth creative solutions to complex problems. Applied across many industries and professions, from education to architecture to technology, design thinking provides a structured way to brainstorm, think outside of the box and generate new ideas that lead to fresh results.

Design thinking is patient. It recognizes that nothing is perfect the first time around and mistakes are opportunities to learn and improve. Tinkering, testing out and experimentation are strategies that design thinking encompasses to encourage iteration and improvement over time. Design thinking does not punish risk, it rewards it and makes it safe.

Design thinking begins with empathy. Both the learner and the teacher's needs are weighed to create the ideal user experience. As a teacher considers questions such as:

- *How do my students learn best?*
- *What do I feel confident and excited about with my teaching practice?*
- *How might I improve the efficiency of transitions from one learning activity to the next?*

A deeply collaborative and interdisciplinary process, design thinking can spark your imagination and open up new perspectives that can reinvigorate your teaching as you explore creative ways to meet a variety of your classroom's needs, from space to instructional design to curricular delivery. Design thinking does not lead to solutions by outside experts, but solutions developed by you and your colleagues based on your unique contexts.

Design thinking is also an inspiring process for learners to engage in— one that fosters ownership of learning while allowing students to practice a powerful 21st century mindset that can be applied in a multitude of settings throughout their lives. *Design thinking* is a verb!

Ways to Use this Playbook

Design Thinking for Students: Tools to take your students through the process of designing their classroom space. Why take your students through this process? If the objective is to increase student ownership of learning, and if we consider space to be integral to designing student-centered learning experiences, then it is logical that students have a part in designing their learning environment. Moreover, engaging in the design thinking process helps cultivates the 21st century skills of problem solving, innovation, and collaboration.

- Access tools and structures for managing a flexible, student-centered classroom
- Adapt teaching personas to match the learning needs of the students and environment
- Help students participate in the design of their classroom space

Classroom Overhaul: Tools to help you analyze your space and activities and develop a vision for your classroom

- Explore how physical space impacts learning
- Understand the affordances and potential of furniture and layout
- Develop a vision for learner-centered classrooms

How does this align to teacher evaluation frameworks?

- Design learner-driven curriculum
- Assess student learning based on practices and processes
- Intentionally design learner-centered classroom spaces
- Differentiate facilitation styles and modes
- ISTE Standards for Educators
- Danielson Framework / CPS Framework for Teaching

How does this align to Student Learning Standards?

- ISTE Standards for Students
- [P21](P21): Framework for 21st Century Learning