ABOUT INSIGHTS

Informed Learning Environments

INSIGHTS by VS offers planning resources for innovative learning environments. Inspired by conversations between educators and architects, INSIGHTS illustrate important connections between learning and learning places.
'The Flexible Classroom' is based on conversations with Victoria Bergsagel and Peter Brown.

VICTORIA BERGSAGEL

Educator Perspective

Victoria is an educator who is passionate about designing schools where all students achieve. Harvard-educated, Victoria has been a teacher, principal, adjunct professor, community relations director, and school district administrator As founder and director of Architects of Achievement, her work is dedicated to helping educators and architects integrate the work of facility design into school reform.

PETER BROWN, AIA

Architect Perspective

Peter Brown has been responsible for leading the planning, design and execution of innovative schools nationally and internationally, resulting in projects awarded by both architects and educators. Peter works with clients to design and implement elegant and agile solutions to complex educational issues.

VS AMERICA
1940 Abbott Street, #501
Charlotte, NC 28203

ph 704-378-6500
fx 704-378-6005

info@vs-charlotte.com
vs-furniture.com

INSIGHTS

The Flexible Classroom

Ideas that anticipate the needs of dynamic learning environments.

For a world in constant motion, the solution is flexibility.

It only takes a visit to a coffee shop, airport, hotel lobby, computer store, business center or modern office to see the new ways we collaborate, communicate, work, and **interact in a dynamic and fluid world**. The global marketplace is changing at record pace. International economies are intertwined. Business is 24/7/365. And up-to-the-millisecond is the new standard of immediacy. Embracing, anticipating and sharing what this means for schools and students is our focus.

Students are on the move. Communicating, creating, sharing, playing, and learning at an accelerated pace. At the same time, educational organizations are increasingly challenged to connect with a wide spectrum of learners. Education practices are transforming to meet the diverse needs of students. Schools are looking across the board at curriculum, daily schedules, assessments, school size, technology, partnerships, and facilities to **create strategies that work in teaching ALL students.**

The most effective environments for learning are **organized to reflect operational practices of schools**. Resources are moving closer to students, teams of teachers are working collaboratively to focus on smaller groups of students, and a variety of space types are offering groups of students and teachers diverse places for diverse needs. **Flexible. Adaptable. Ready to move. Ready for change.**

Studies prove that well thought-out facilities contribute to teaching and learning performance. Bricks and mortar elements of day lighting, indoor air quality, and temperature control, as well as ergonomic features of chairs and desks have shown **to improve academic performance and time on task.**

Instant access. More choices. Deeper connectedness. Greater mobility. The new reality is here. Now. And about to change.

Five key concepts for higher performance in any learning environment.

1 ANTICIPATE A VARIETY OF ACTIVITIES
Dynamic learning environments facilitate the activities of engaged learners: working alone, collaborating in small groups, and demonstrating knowledge within large groups. At times students are engaged in active hands-on learning. Other times they are attentive in academic work. And now digital tools allow learning connections in the classroom and beyond. **This range in activities and connectivity requires flexible thinking – creating agile learning environments with the ability to change on the fly.**

2 ONE SIZE DOESN'T FIT ALL
Students and teachers come in all shapes and sizes, and they teach and learn in different ways and different styles. Some learn by seeing, some hearing, and some learn through doing. Planning for **diversity in styles and sizes creates variety in spaces and furnishings:** formal and informal places for collaborating, discussing, creating, listening; variety in furniture that supports a variety of activities, and a range of seating to support a range of students. Dynamic learning environments let students learn in ways they learn best.

3 MAKE IT MOVE
Dynamic learning environments are on the move. Classrooms that **transform from individual work, to group work, to presentations and demonstrations.** Tables that allow sitting or standing. Chairs that allow movement. Mobile furniture supports fluid learning environments, variety for changing needs, and quick transformations for collaboration.
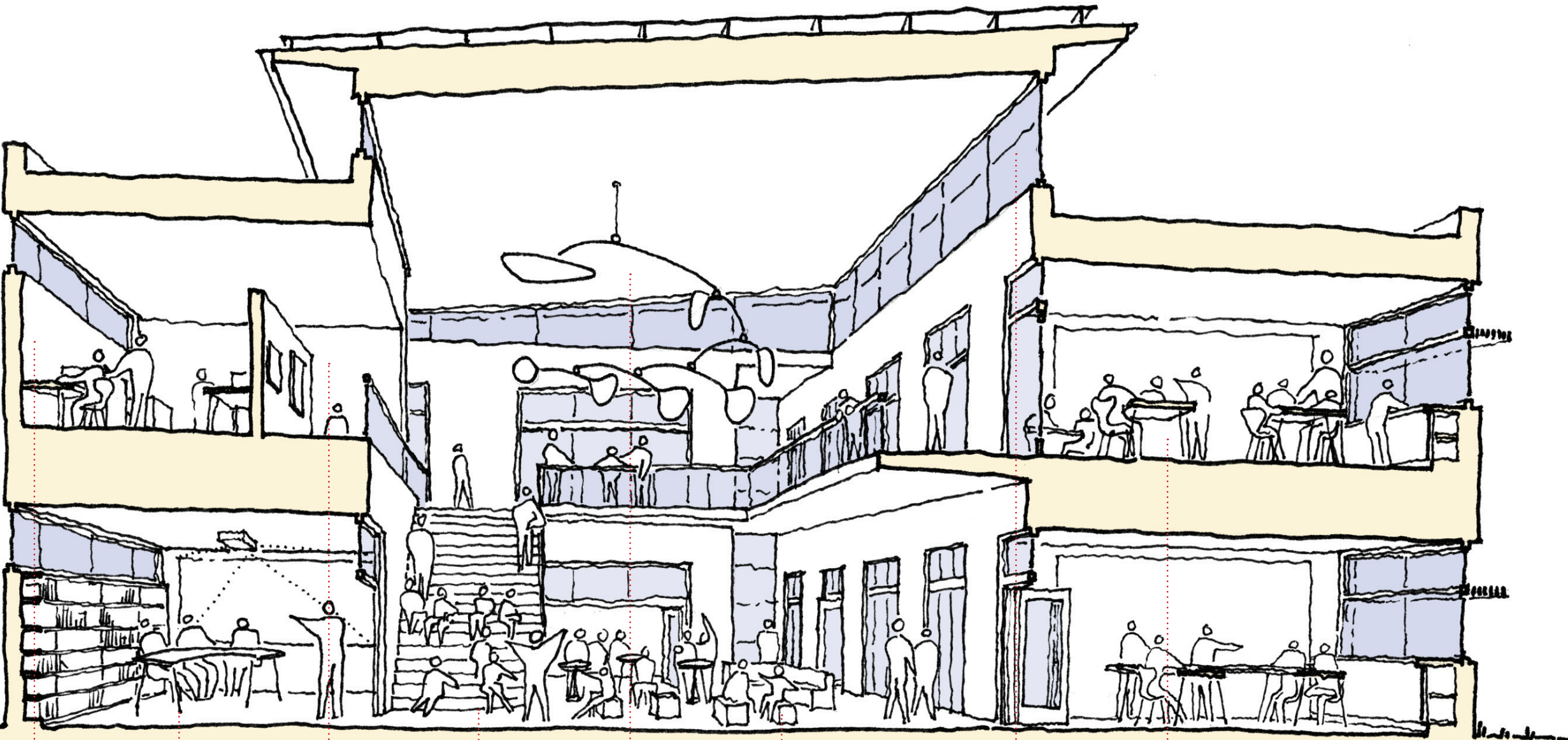
4 CONTROL CLUTTER
What you don't see is as important as what you do see. Students engaged with projects and portfolios need places to hold their work for extended periods of time. **Effective storage for teacher materials, instructional support, and student work creates more space for learning.**

5 CHANGE IS INEVITABLE – MAKE IT EASY
Flexible spaces are designed to change: year-by-year, day-by-day and minute-by-minute. **Maximize educational opportunities, and furniture investments through flexible solutions.** Furniture systems that anticipate change meet today's needs and extend possibilities for future generations.

Typical spaces. Terrific solutions.

Creative ideas that promote collaboration, efficiency, agility and performance.

Teacher planning area supports COLLABORATION among professionals.

Small resource library accommodates small groups and places resources CLOSE TO STUDENT ACTIVITY.

Gallery for DISPLAYING student work.

Stair doubles as IMPROMPTU PLACE for performances and discussions.

Ceiling surface provides PLANE FOR ARTWORK and student projects.

BREAKOUT SPACE allows large group instruction, room for projects, display of student work, and informal interaction.

Day lighting improves student performance, and REDUCES ENERGY CONSUMPTION.

Flexible furniture solutions encourage multiple arrangements for VARIETY IN TEACHING and learning.

How do we best learn?

The US-based National Research Council (2003) offers three essential components.

1 ACTIVE INQUIRY

Ask questions, make discoveries and collaborate. Active inquiry uses more of our senses and suggests places for thinking, making and doing. Students listening in large groups, building hands-on projects in small groups, making connections or networking beyond the school. In classrooms that act more like libraries, conference centers, or workshops. Learning that creates tangible results.
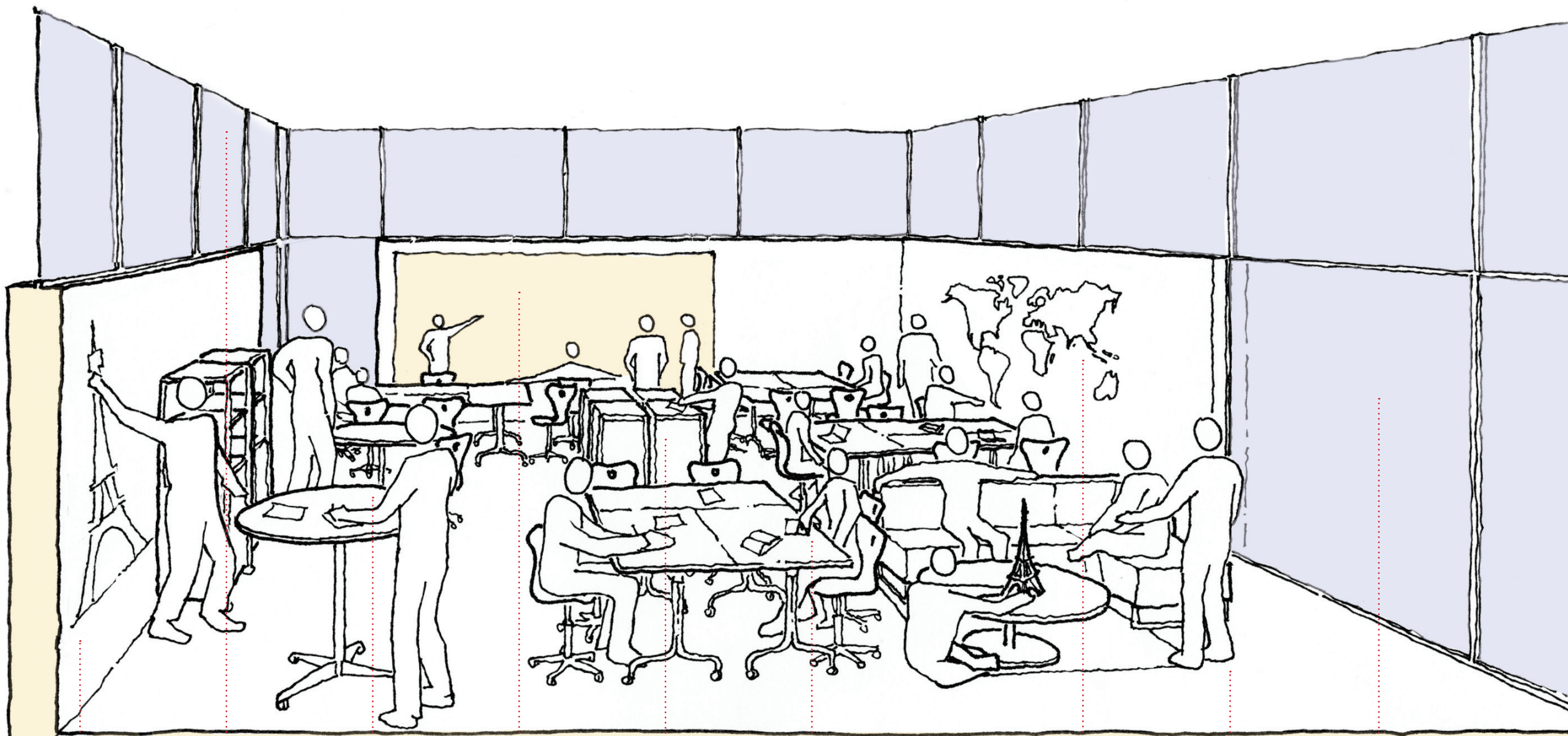
2 IN-DEPTH LEARNING

Delving deeply into a topic allows us to perform at higher levels. Participate. Discover. Explore. Develop projects that build on ideas, day-by-day. Projects incorporating lessons from reading, math, science, and history. In the learning environment, we can anticipate students working for longer periods of time – allowing for comfortable seating, movable tables, storage solutions, and displays for student work.

3 SHOW WHAT WE KNOW

Teaching to address multiple learning styles also offers multiple ways to assess student performance. Artifacts and evidence of learning may come in many forms: tests, portfolios, presentations, videos, drawings, multimedia experiences, dramatic productions or public speaking. Flexible learning environments anticipate multiple ways to demonstrate knowledge, providing a venue for students to make, store, display and express their work.

One space. Many transformations.

Flexible classrooms strategies for dynamic teaching and learning.

SEMINAR DISCUSSIONS

TRADITIONAL LECTURES

LARGE GROUP DISCUSSIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

STUDENT WORK STATIONS

Plan walls as MULTIPURPOSE DISPLAYS for presentations, discussions, projections, resources and display of student work.

Windows allow natural daylight and views to the outdoors, shown to IMPROVE PERFORMANCE and productivity.

Tables designed for sitting and standing allow STUDENT MOVEMENT, foster conversation, provide a convenient table for presentations, and provide a great option for teacher work stations.

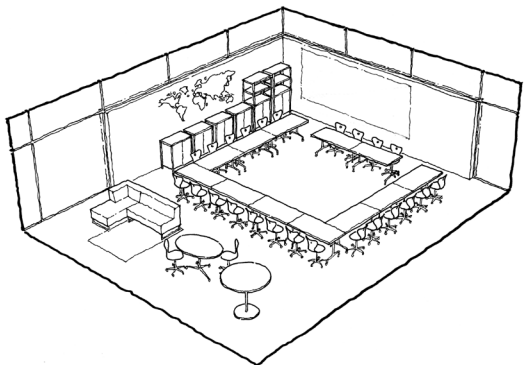Dynamic classrooms allow multiple places for MULTIMEDIA PRESENTATIONS, and plan for mobile computers and projectors.

Mobile storage systems place RESOURCES CLOSE TO STUDENTS and frees the walls to be used for presentations and student work.

Flexible student tables can be easily arranged for a VARIETY OF GROUP SIZES, accommodating a variety in teaching and learning styles.

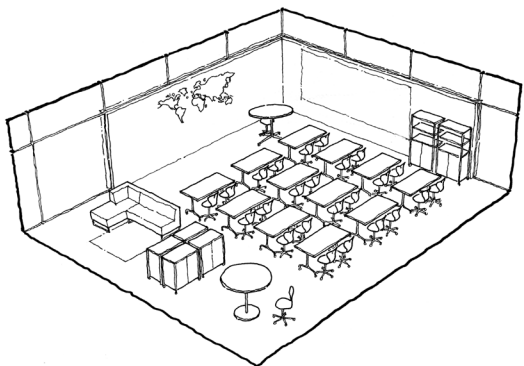Technology networks provide GLOBAL CONNECTIONS and expand possibilities for student interaction.

Soft seating areas ENGAGE STUDENTS in a casual and comfortable place for discussions, reading, games or projects.

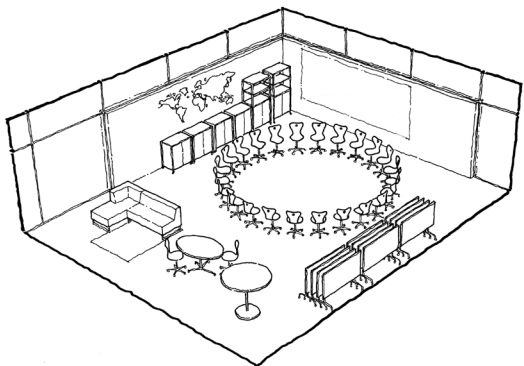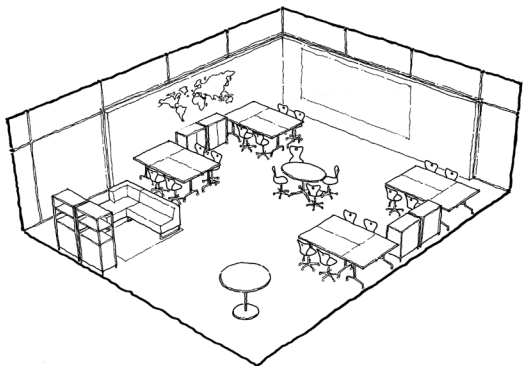Interior windows INCREASE CONNECTIONS among colleagues and with activities beyond the classroom.

Agile furniture.

Expand opportunities with furniture systems that keep pace with dynamic teaching and learning.

CREATIVE COMBINATIONS

Hard-working furniture systems can be combined to further classroom possibilities. Mobile technology allowing for both formal and impromptu presentations. A rolling partition screen used to create study carrels. Or a teacher's table that can be used for sitting or standing, a discussion table or presentation podium.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION AND PRESENTATIONS

CARRELS FOR PRIVATE STUDY

TEACHER WORK, DISCUSSION, AND PRESENTATIONS

Anticipating change.

Flexible classrooms accommodate many teaching and learning styles and are always ready for the next move.

PLANNING NIMBLE CLASSROOMS

Teachers and students engaged with in-depth learning and active inquiry respond to nimble classrooms: spaces that are able to anticipate the next activity. Furnishings allow variety in group sizes, people sizes and activities. And sometimes furniture that even disappears altogether. Walls that can support large presentations as well as several small ones. Mobile technology, easily within reach for students and teachers. Creative classrooms that allow students and teachers to explore. Classrooms ready for change.

ABOUT THIS CLASSROOM

Size: 24 students , 850 - 900 square feet,
Proportion: 1:1.2
Furnishings: 12 student tables
                26 student chairs
                6 mobile storage units
                1 group of lounge seating
                2 circular tables for standing and sitting

Technology: In this classroom, technology is mobile, hand-held, wired, and wireless, creating a technology-rich learning environment that connects students and teachers with each other and the world.

Walls: With mobile storage systems, walls surfaces are free for projection, writing and display. Walls in this classroom are not directional, allowing multiple activities, large and small presentations, and multiple configurations.

FLEXIBLE FURNISHINGS

Flexible furniture solutions have the versatility to meet a variety of classroom possibilities and learning needs:
• Hands-on projects in small groups
• Large group discussions
• Whole group presentations
• Student presentation and performance
• Individual student work