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FROM DATA RETRIEVAL TO DATA CREATION: TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR MODERN MEDIA CENTERS

Design and functionality in a school facility can have a significant impact on the learner experience. No space offers an opportunity to incorporate modern learning styles better than the media center, already the most adaptive and consistently changing space in any given school facility. When learning outpaces design, schools and districts face the challenge of sufficiently adapting to accommodate all students. Prevalent technology use and an expanded understanding of student learning techniques have spurred the reconfiguration of the media center to become a hub for students of every learning style.

The traditional methods of storing, sharing and disseminating media/information have also shifted with the greater understanding of the learner experience. This constant metamorphosis is evidenced by the space's many titles over time; the library became the IMC which later transformed into the media center, learning commons or instructional center.

The flaw of outdated spaces is that the design of the media center may not reflect or support these changes, in turn leading to underutilization of and lack of student engagement with the space. This presents both a challenge and major opportunity for schools to reconsider the role of the media center. What would it take to get your facility's media center up to speed with the dynamic needs of today's learners?

Keeping up with learning models requires an understanding of the underlying shifting factors for today's schools to face. Several key factors are driving the need for change in school facilities, particularly within the media center:

- Personalized Learning
- Hands-on / Project-based learning
- Role of technology
- New forms of media
- Flexibility / future adaptability

These are just some of the potential considerations for school districts as they broach the subject of modernizing learning environments. A complete overhaul is not always a feasible or even necessary option, which is why media centers offer a critical opportunity for districts to make substantive change without starting over from square one.

MEDIA AT THE HEART OF THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

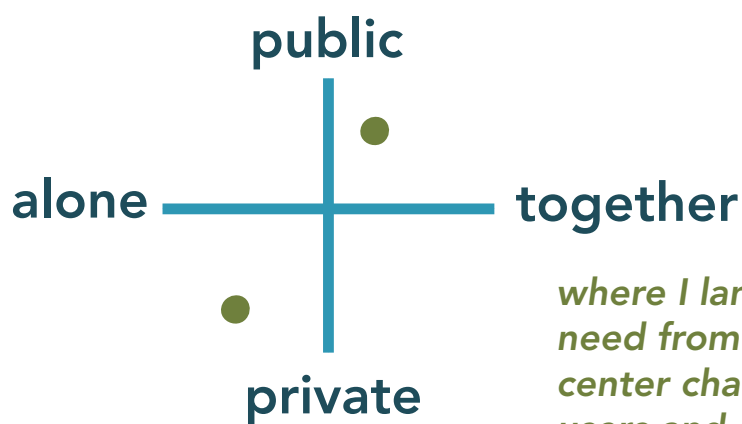
Media, at its most basic level, means “the system and organizations of communication through which information is spread to a large number of people.” The emergence of the internet and the prevalence of personal devices revolutionized the information sharing process for 21st century learners. More than ever before, students are able to access information instantaneously wherever they go. Historically, students accessed only print media in a school's expansive library collection and learned to do research by navigating a card catalogue system. From a spatial utilization perspective, a traditional library or media center was primarily dedicated to storage for book stacks and the atmosphere was typically encouraged to be quiet, with individual work as the main focus.

However, education has drastically changed in the time since the school library first opened. An effective modern media center incorporates design elements for learning styles across the continually-growing spectrum. Educators are increasingly embracing personalized learning as a tool to unlock the capabilities of every student, allowing them to excel with their natural skills while identifying areas requiring additional support. This shift toward recognizing the unique individual needs of every student has led to a recognition that students both learn and demonstrate their learning in different ways.

This approach, in turn, necessitates a variety of spatial options to support the ever-changing needs of students.

“I think that libraries are as important in schools as they ever were, but they need to look radically different than they did in the past.”

*- Dr. John Burkey, Executive Director,
Large Unit District Association & Former
Superintendent, Huntley (IL) Community
School District 158*



where I land and what I need from the media center changes based on users and current need

Each learning style requires its own set of spatial options ranging from collaborative group space to individualized areas for a focused process.

Additionally, schools demonstrate a growing trend toward experiential learning or “learning by doing” through project-based and hands-on strategies, allowing students to be active participants in their education and explore their curiosities through inquiry and exploration. Finally, technology has significantly impacted the way students collaborate, share and interact, leading to a shifting definition of what “media” is and who creates it.

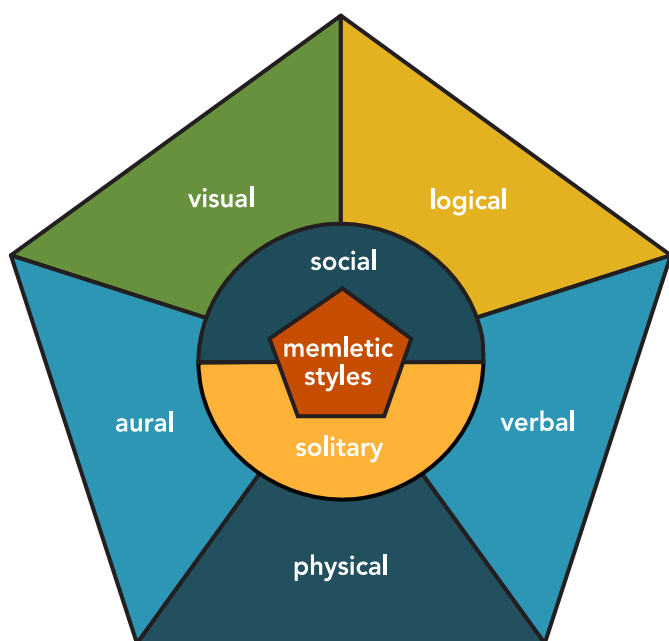
A result of these changes has been a dramatic paradigm shift away from the media center being “storage-centered” to now being “learner-centered” and utilizing an updated prioritization of space. A cutting-edge media center goes beyond the static repository of information model to a new dynamic, active space that supports content creation, collaboration and personalized learning.

TRENDS IN THE LEADING EDGE MEDIA CENTER

TREND 1: Reallocation of Space from Storage and Decentralization

Large physical print collections used to present the challenge of requiring sufficient, secure storage space in a library. As collections become available digitally and space is liberated for new uses, less of the media center needs to be secured from the larger facility. This allows for the physical boundary of the media center to be less distinct, with many schools opting for an open “learning commons” design style, potentially dispersed throughout an entire building. This does not mean the media center has gone away; rather, educators have found this type of space is crucial enough to the learning process that it must extend beyond the original confines.

Some schools have taken a cue from the public library system by incorporating online reservation and self-checkout of materials as well as high-density storage solutions for print materials, since few access these materials by in-person browsing. These materials can be secured compactly without taking up valuable space, which re-allocates more area to support learning activities.



Learning styles and other student needs impact the design and functionality of a media center space. Having a mix of spaces can help facilitate effective learning for all students, no matter their unique set of needs.

Case Study: Idalia PK-12

A unique option for a school media center is to incorporate the space in smaller segments throughout the building as opposed to one dedicated area. Idalia opted to break apart the traditional media center model to disperse resources in various wings of the building. This approach allows the media center to become a cohesive element of the facility design and reach students in their native environments without making a trip to one designated space. Spreading the resources throughout the building helps break the barrier between classroom learning and the individual learner experience of today's media center.

Case Study: Hermantown Middle/High School

When Hermantown Community Schools began the design process for its new High School, the future of the media center was a central driving force. The existing space was primarily dedicated to book storage, which left little room for student collaboration. With the new space, the district valued creating the type of space where students are invigorated and empowered to learn in new ways. The new High School is designed entirely around a “deconstructed” media center, called the Digital Commons, which serves as the hub and heart of their learning space. Students can reserve books online, which are stored in a high-density storage system; this reallocation of space serves the collection needs while prioritizing student learning needs.



Hermantown High School Media Center



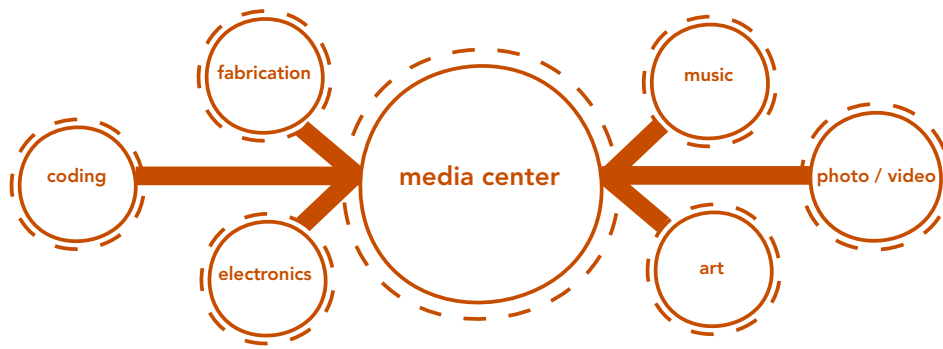
Idalia PK-12 Dispersed Learning Space



Huntley High School Media Center

INTEGRATING CREATIVE SPACES WITH MEDIA CENTERS

- Media Centers allow for overlapping types of creative projects and collaboration between fields:
 - Media Digital (images / video / music / coding / writing)
 - Physical (art / photography / mixed media / performance)
 - Technical (electronics / fabrication)
- The “raw” pieces of projects can be created in specialized spaces (activity labs, photo lab, art studio, etc.) and the Media Center provides the collaboration spaces necessary to put these pieces together:



Media centers facilitate a fluid learning experience, shifting from the stagnant model of data retrieval to an updated model of data creation.

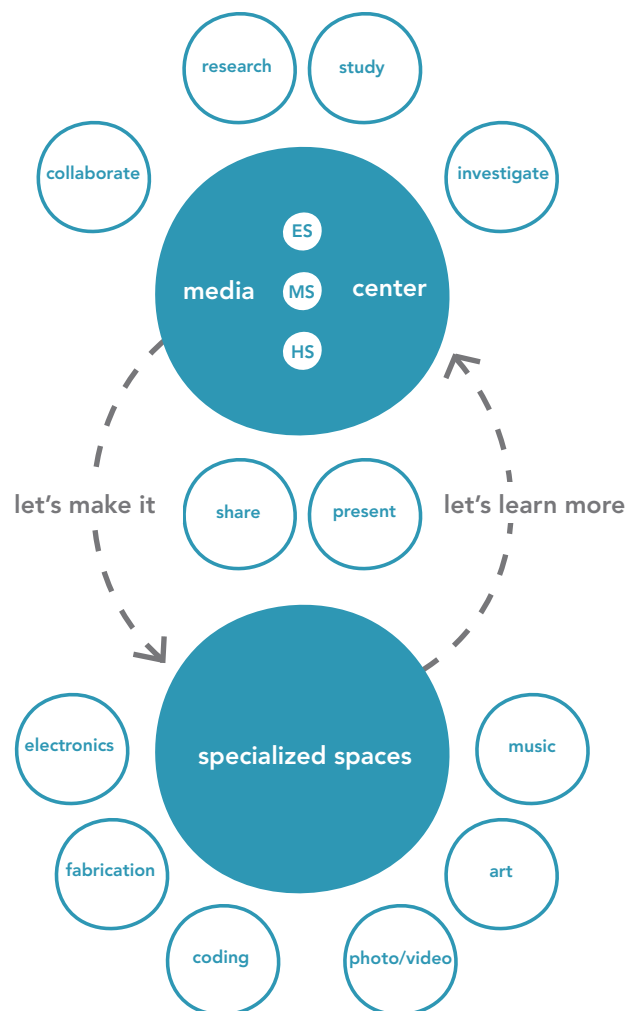
Case Study: Huntley High School

This high school in Huntley, IL needed to accommodate growing enrollment and bring the design up to today’s modern standards. The previous gymnasium space became a multi-floor learning resource center equipped with collaboration pods, individual workspaces, a classroom and other resources for adaptive learners. The previous library space now houses a student study cafe for even more student learning environments. The variety of designated spaces allows for learners of all types to find their favorite workspace and thrive in a productive environment.

TREND 2: Diverse Spatial Opportunities

The media center serves as a focal point for the educational community by providing access to unique resources, tools and spaces. Media center designs can incorporate a variety of spatial options, including areas to brainstorm, collaborate on projects, record and edit videos or work individually.

Adaptable furniture plays a key role in this transformation by promoting student choice and the ability to reconfigure and adapt to future change. A variety of furniture is crucial to support student needs on any given day.



TREND 3: Opportunities for Content Creation

Providing space and opportunities for students to transform learning from static consumption to interactive creation unleashes hidden potential and passion. An effective, modern media center supports this creative process with the use of “makerspaces” which facilitate various kinds of student creation. Whether it’s 3D printing, videography, animation, podcasting or other outlets, makerspaces accommodate the growing curiosity of students and give them the ability to demonstrate comprehension and retention of a topic through a medium of their choosing.

Creative, designed-centric thinking is an important skill for students to develop to “learn to learn.” Incorporating makerspaces into a media center design plan can support this type of inquiry. Author and professor of educational technology John Spencer describes design-based thinking as a “way of solving problems that encourages risk-taking and creativity...providing a methodology for creating innovative solutions to a vast array of difficult problems.” Students use an iterative process to define a challenge, generate ideas, make drafts, get feedback and refine their work; as a result, they learn creative problem solving.

TREND 4: Role of Technology

The current generation of students, as well as all future generations of students, grew up with technology as an influential and instrumental part of their lives. They are early adopters of new technologies and rely on a variety of digital means to learn, communicate and express themselves. As more students access information through personal devices, additional technological support and infrastructure are essential elements of a modern, adaptive media center.

Today’s students live in a time of rapid information and knowledge exchange. Students today access a wide variety of media types to enhance their learning. Students might follow their curiosity and gain relevant learning from livestreaming a TED Talk by a university professor, participating in a digital field trip to a location thousands of miles away or taking a webinar with peers from across the world - all from a personal hand-held device. The media center needs to provide a variety of flexible spaces to support these activities as well as those that have not been invented yet.



Silverthorne Elementary School Media Center



Shakopee High School Media Center



Each school and district have the chance to determine which areas of a media center need security and which can remain open to the rest of the learning environment. There's an opportunity to keep the space open and accessible while maintaining security for some materials.

QUESTIONS TO START A CONVERSATION ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL'S MEDIA CENTER:

- What spaces are needed to support educational initiatives like personalized and project-based learning?
- A “kit of parts” is the combination of types of spaces that together will be needed in the new design concept. What is our kit of parts for this project?
- Which spatial options are necessary for a functional space?
- How can the media center design incorporate varied spatial options to diversify the functionality?
- What spaces should be available to students before and after school?
- How might students use this space as a center for innovation and collaboration throughout the day?
- What role does the media center play as the hub of the school?
- What needs to be locked down / secured?
- Why does it need to be secured?
- When does it need to be secured?
- How much space will we allocate to collection?
- Is “real-time” browsing necessary, or is digital browsing more effective in locating desired and similar content?

The media center is not obsolete - in fact, it's just the opposite. Perhaps no other space in a school is better situated to impact all learners and spark innovation. School administrators, media support specialists and all those involved in the education of today's learners have a unique opportunity to think strategically and adapt learning spaces to best support the educational mission.

Changing learning styles may present challenges to the former model for schools, but in actuality these “challenges” are prime opportunities ready for the taking. With new insights into how students learn and what they require to develop a strong knowledge base, media centers can include features to fulfill these needs and bolster the learning experience moving forward. How can your school's media center support all learners today and into the future?

“I walk in here and I see this room almost completely full with students... that is when I know that our philosophy and our architecture really did match together.”

- Dr. Scott Rowe, Superintendent, Huntley Community School District 158 & Former Principal, Huntley High School

For more information and to discuss opportunities for your community, call 1-888-254-6789 or email info@woldae.com.

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