

By Ann W. Davis and Kim Kappler-Hewitt

# Australia's Campfires, Caves, and



Students visit the “campfire” to hear a story at Northern Beaches School in Sydney. Visit [vimeo.com/49879366](https://vimeo.com/49879366) to take a video tour of the school and see how educators are creating learning spaces that personalize and differentiate instruction.

**E**ducators recognize that they need to create new learning and teaching environments where the curriculum and instructional tools reflect today's world. Our schools are full of students who want to engage, socialize, communicate, create, and collaborate in meaningful ways that reflect the world in which they live. How can education re-create itself to engage these learners and keep up with the pace of this change? What can educators do in response to change and to reach their digital students?

These questions led our group of 17 educators (university professors,

directors of technology, classroom teachers, tech coordinators, library media specialists, corporate representatives, researchers, ISTE's president, and two board members) from the United States and Norway on a two-week study tour to Australia to seek answers.

### Transforming Learning Spaces

Australia has long been known for setting the pace in ed tech pedagogy and practices. To get a sample of what educators are doing in this country, the study group visited the Australian Council for Computers in Education conference (ACCE). While

there, several of our group members presented and led sessions during the week. We also visited a variety of schools, libraries, professional development centers, and educational organizations in Perth, Melbourne, and Sydney. One concept that caught our attention was the construction of learning spaces to support personalized and differentiated instruction in several schools.

Futurist David Thornburg identifies three archetypal learning spaces—the campfire, cave, and watering hole—that schools can use as physical spaces and virtual spaces for student and adult learning ([bit.ly/YvRuWC](http://bit.ly/YvRuWC))

# Watering Holes

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Educators on ISTE's Australian Study Tour discovered how to create new learning and teaching environments where curriculum and instructional tools meet the digital age.  
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**The campfire** is a space where people gather to learn from an expert. In the days of yore, wise elders passed down insights through storytelling, and in doing so replicated culture for the next generation. In today's schools, the experts are not only teachers and guest speakers, but also students who are empowered to share their learning with peers and other teachers.

**The watering hole** is an informal space where peers can share information and discoveries, acting as both learner and teacher simultaneously. This shared space can serve as an incubator for ideas and can promote a sense of shared culture.

**The cave** is a private space where an individual can think, reflect, and transform learning from external knowledge to internal belief. Schools across Australia had both posters and places to encourage this private individual time.

Students visit the campfire to hear the story we want to tell through our instruction. They are able to share in this experience in person or via technology in a flipped classroom.

The watering hole used to be the walk home after school or the phone calls after dinner. Now students gather with peers online using Facebook, Edmodo, blog posts, or text messages. Their opportunities to share have multiplied astronomically and can benefit from the guidance provided by school-created platforms for discussion.

Increasingly, studies of the brain and learning indicate the need for metacognition, which takes time, practice, and a quiet space to reflect.

The cave becomes not only inviting, but also essential. As students reflect on the meaning of their work, the content cements, and a new cycle of goal setting and achievement begins, allowing students to engage, socialize, communicate, create, and collaborate in meaningful learning that reflects the world in which they live.

The cave is perhaps the most challenging venue for students as they are called upon to reflect by themselves. But technology can inspire students through the examples offered in student blogs. Private thoughts made public demonstrate that personal reflection is valued, every opinion matters, and knowledge rests at your fingertips within a search box.

At the Carey Baptist Grammar School Library in Melbourne, the librarian has been experimenting with her use of space. The school is on the cusp of constructing a new library media facility. It was here that we first came across the idea of cave, campfire, and watering hole. She explained that as she planned the school's new facility, they would use Thornburg's concepts. She noted that one of the ways she experiments with the cave concept is to take desks and chairs and place them in corners and crevices that are off the main floor of the library. Inevitably, she finds these spaces occupied and even coveted by students and teachers in search of quiet and reflection. These isolated study spots are excellent examples of cave zones.

The Northern Beaches Christian School provided us with compelling examples of spaces that could simultaneously accommodate learners in multiple phases of their learning

quests. The classroom demonstrates how a campfire space to the rear conjoins with a comfortable watering hole space where students can easily move around and work next to each other in a social way. The students also created a cave-type environment by reconfiguring the removable furniture.

## Personalizing Instruction

What does this concept mean for teachers? How can it transform learning and teaching? This construct of learning spaces allows teachers to adapt the learning to meet the needs of students—to personalize instruction and allow students to explore different modes of learning.

If the class uses digitized content, and students are empowered to access the content through the media that makes the most sense to them, then teachers can move throughout the classroom zones of campfire, watering hole, and cave, both personalizing and individualizing instruction.

At Carey Baptist School in Melbourne, we saw examples of teachers collaborating on a Shakespeare unit by posting their best lessons and resources on a website. All teachers maintained a blog for students to read. Students collaborated both in class and online. Formative feedback from students and teachers occurred in the physical and virtual watering holes. Students and teachers vetted and shared final projects publicly. Creating this culture requires tremendous up-front planning, but once teachers make the content accessible through the ubiquitous learning platform, they are unrestricted to meet the needs of all learners.

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North Beaches Christian School's cave-type environment.

### Inspiring Educators

Of course, meeting students' needs requires time for ongoing, high-quality professional development for teachers and administrators. At the Adult Contemporary Learning Hub at the Catholic Education Office's Newman Siena Centre in Perth, we visited a newly renovated professional learning facility mirroring the desired student learning design. The multiuse spaces accommodate teachers in their personal learning endeavors. Teachers work together in the social watering hole spirit; turn a discussion into a campfire opportunity; or find a quiet space to think, reflect, and create.

Educators do not have to be technology experts to use these ideas. They do need to be content experts and have a solid pedagogical background with a passion to reach the hearts and minds of today's digital generation. They need to knit together the content in ways that engage learners, extend learning outside the proverbial walls of schools, and transform the learning and teaching process. Educators need to think carefully about how to support exploration with guided questions and well-crafted interactions.

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### Study Tour Events at ISTE 2013

Get a taste of what it was like to take a study tour to Australia at ISTE 2013 in San Antonio. Explore fascinating schools, learning spaces, and influential educational organizations during a conference session called ISTE 2012 Down Under: Our Study Tour Discoveries. It will be held Wednesday, June 26, at 8:30 a.m. in Room 102 of the San Antonio Convention Center. Tour members will share what they learned and how they put some of these ideas into practice.

The study tour's Birds of a Feather session is another chance to meet the people who made this trip or other study tours. This gathering is slated for Tuesday, June 25, from 5 to 6:15 p.m. (check the Final Program for location).



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