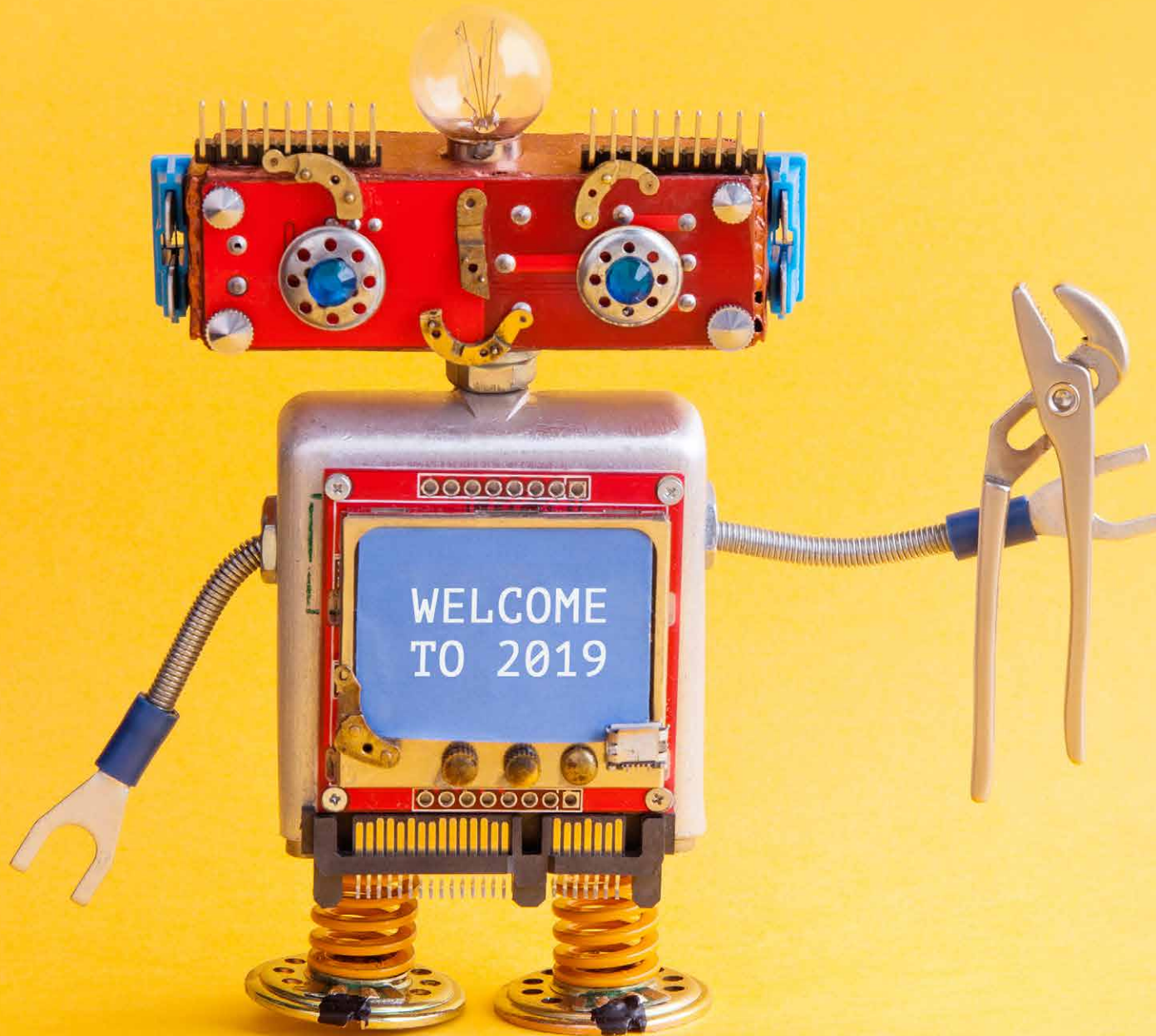# DESIGNING FOR A CREATIVITY CULTURE

By Danielle O'Grady, IIDA

Educators, administrators, parents and community members alike join school board members today in hopes of provoking meaningful change for the betterment of students' lives. As a result, these stakeholders are in a race to cultivate a generation of innovators like never before.

Undoubtedly, your school community has questioned what connection might exist between physical space and the demand for outcomes rooted in collaboration, communication, critical thinking and creativity. Creativity. . .it's a skillset believed to be the life blood of innovation and yet mythologized as being owned only by uniquely "creative types" or specific only to "artistic works."

In *Creative Confidence: Unleashing the Creative Potential Within Us All*, authors Tom Kelley and David Kelley illuminate the way to cultivating the origination of new and imaginative ideas in us all. They stress the importance of creativity in the resolution of challenges large and small. Additionally, the book shines a bright light on the role that physical space plays in a climate of innovation. One of the most important roles your learning environments can exude is in enabling your school culture. . .in being an agent for action in developing today's Modern Learner.

So you may be asking yourself, "What is school culture?" School culture refers to the way teachers, staff and all other stakeholders previously mentioned (including students themselves) work together toward a set of beliefs, values and assumptions that they ultimately all share. A positive school climate and culture promotes students' ability to learn. Each of these stakeholders are valuable contributors to the visioning and execution of a successful school culture. We are ALL designers! And there is much more than just architecture to be considered!

So, what do spaces designed for a Creativity Culture look like? Diane Laufenberg, Executive Director of Inquiry Schools, tells us, "In schools, you can have control and compliance OR innovation and creativity, but you can't have both." There is no one-size-fits-all solution when it comes to a supporting environment, but there is a set of common characteristics:

- **The Building as a System. . .where learning happens EVERYWHERE!—** Kelley and Kelley tell us to "Support Spark!" We have got to provide opportunities for creative serendipity between ALL users. This notion, more than any other, is turning the "traditional" school model on its head.

- **The Building as a Messenger—**Branding isn't about just athletics anymore. Integrated visual elements can be

key in establishing norms, in inspiring activity and informing past process/next steps.

- **"Agile" is the New "Flexible"—**Not only do creative spaces have to be adaptable to change, but they have to afford for quick shifts in delivery too.

- **The Writing is on the Wall—**Kelley and Kelley tell us to hone our abilities in drawing and sketching as a mode of communicating ideas and developing them with others. Strategically placed writeable wall materials and table-top surfaces, even whole rooms meant for doodling, support these skills.

In designing for a Creativity Culture, we not only have to look to the built environment, but to our view of relationships with each other. We ask, "What do these relationships need from physical space to develop an atmosphere of innovation?"

- **Student-to-Student Relationships**
  - Importance of Social Spaces
  - Access to Break-Out/Small Group Spaces
  - Confidence Building and Trust Invoking

- **Student-to-Teacher Relationships**
  - Smaller Learning Communities/Teams
  - Quantities of Allocated Physical Space
  - Posture and Organization of Space

- **Staff Support and Teacher Collaboration Spaces**
  - Professional Learning Communities
  - Integration of a Data-Driven Approach
  - Owned Classrooms vs. Shared Classrooms

Incorporating opportunities for respite and reflection are just as important as active, messy, collaborative spaces in a Creativity Culture. This feeds into the notion that all children are different and their unique learning styles must all be addressed by varied instruction. A balance must be found between mental exertion and regeneration. Promoting quiet spaces and quiet time includes the following benefits for students:

- **Wellbeing**
  - Physical Activity
  - Stretching/Yoga
- **Mindfulness**
  - Meditation
  - Practicing Gratitude
- **Health**
  - Diet/Food Preparation
  - Healthy Eating initiatives

As board members engaging in this drive for innovation, asserting your ideas and vision for school culture is critical. While it is important to focus your efforts around the overall wellbeing of staff and students, around their security and the "messaging" surrounding these transformational efforts, you may lack confidence in conversations revolving around architectural design processes, physical elements of space, cost modeling and timelines. Engaging with your architect early will streamline a consensus building process. Your architect can provide visual aids, inspirational images and even a whole vocabulary of terminology meant to help your district communicate its vision for a progressive student experience in your buildings.

In defining your district's own Creativity Culture, remember that the opportunity to design the built environment can be a catalyst for transformational shifts in mindset, but it can't be relied upon as a lone solution. It's important not to just LOOK creative, but to BE creative too! Stretch your thinking to focus on practices, policies and performance models that shine bright a light on the need for innovation. The world and your students are expecting it!

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