

## The Learning Landscape

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Students often complain about their learning environments, whether it's comfort, mobility, or the aesthetics. They often describe their schools as feeling like a warehouse or even a jail. These oppressive and sterile surroundings are just not conducive to learning. In response to this need, we issued our students a challenge: design a piece of furniture better suited for the 21st century learning environment.

Throughout the project, our students learned how to empathize, synthesize data, brainstorm ideas, and prototype solutions that met engineering, humanities, and design specifications. The project culminated with students designing and building eight innovative pieces of classroom furniture to meet the needs of their clients: a class of fifth grade students that were dissatisfied by their learning environment.

### Teacher Reflection

This ambitious project was led by STEM and supported by humanities. As an anthropologist, my favorite part was when our students gathered data to understand and empathize with their fifth grade users, because students are not often provided with enough opportunities to think outside themselves. The most challenging portion was engineering the students' ambitious designs. We empowered them to pursue wild ideas, but we still had to engineer them to meet safety and durability specifications. The most satisfying part of the challenge was delivering the newly constructed furniture to our unsuspecting users. The looks on the fifth graders' faces made every moment of this challenge worth it.

—Lindsey Ott

### Student Reflection

We learned core concepts in math, science, and humanities while producing new and innovative designs for furniture. My team designed a Ferris wheel bookshelf that not only stored materials on the shelves, but also had rotating bins where the students could place their belongings. That idea allowed us to tackle a key science concept, rotational mass, in an engaging way that provided us with a great education and the elementary school with a great bookshelf.

—Jon

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