

2021

A prototype for
learning and leading

The Schoolhouse

The Google School for Leaders is devoted to developing brilliant and effective leaders who can meet the challenges of their intensely dynamic business and social environments.

The curriculum focuses on cultivating both competence and consciousness to ensure leaders' ability to mature and evolve as quickly as contexts demand.



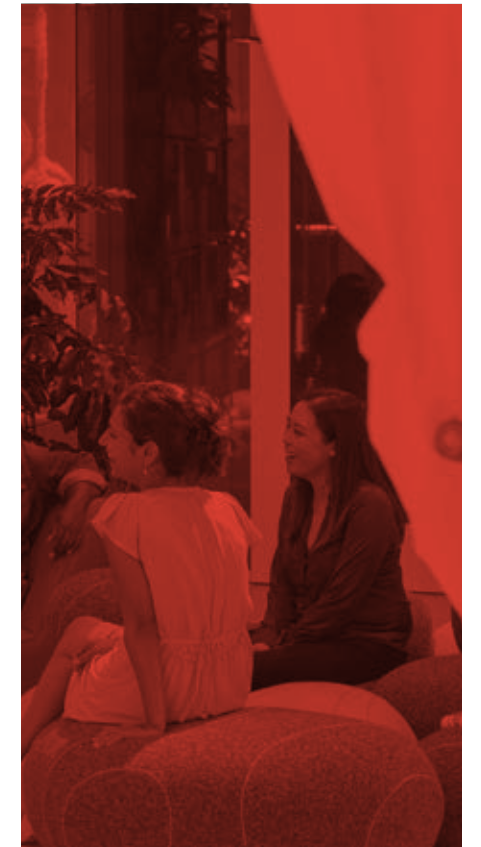
Where we learn
and how we
learn is every bit
as important as
what we learn.

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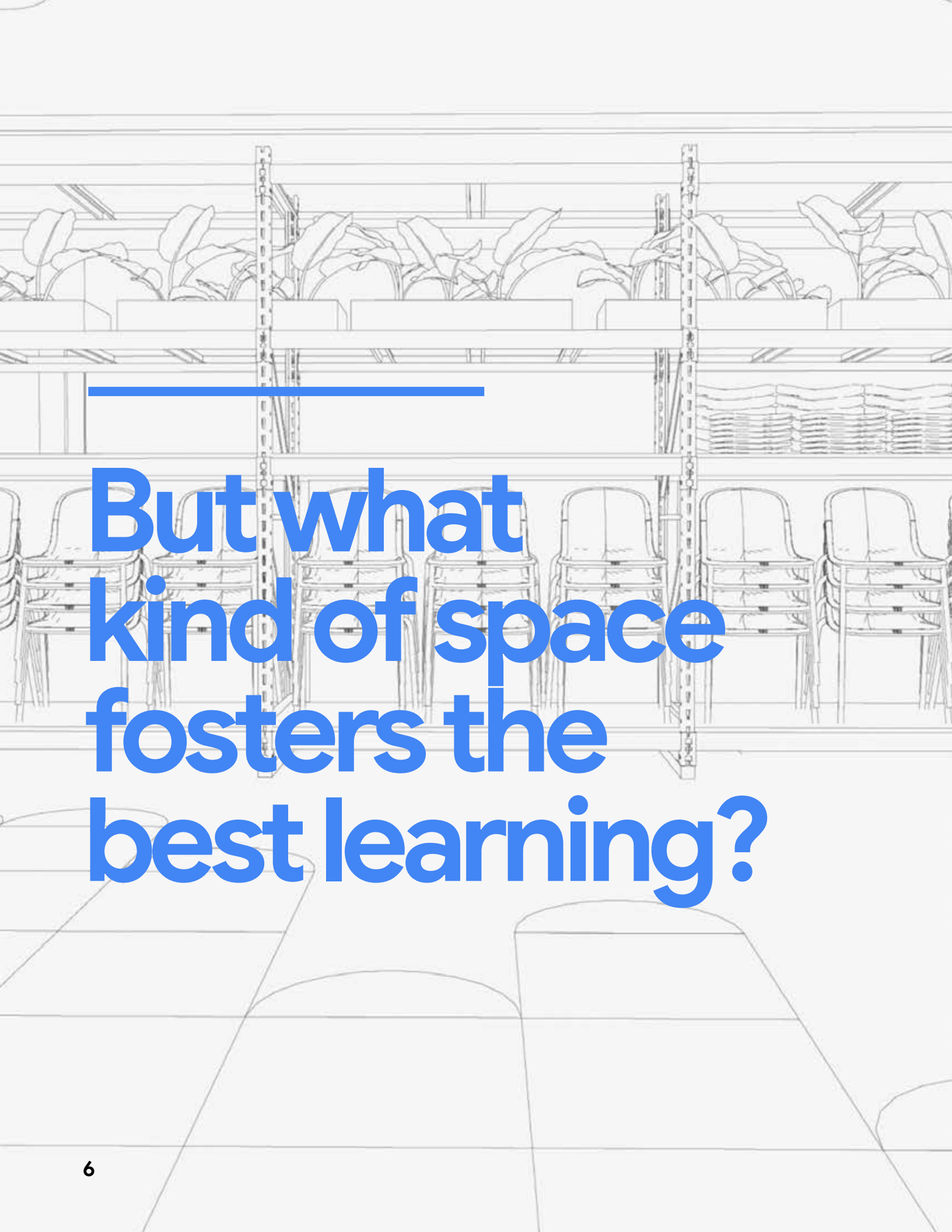
The Google
School for Leaders

In 2017, the School launched a project to create a bespoke physical space that would support the specialized programs it designs and runs specifically for Google's senior executives.

Research has shown that the look and feel of a space can evoke positive emotions, which in turn influence positive experiences: When people are relaxed and engaged, they remember and more easily integrate what they've learned. Where we learn and how we learn is every bit as important as what we learn.

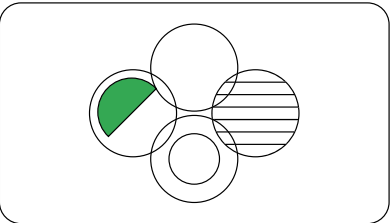


< Original
Schoolhouse
poster before
official branding

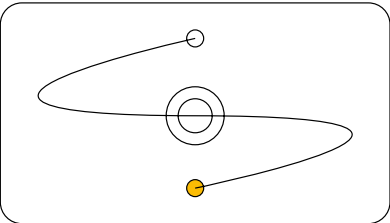


But what kind of space fosters the best learning?

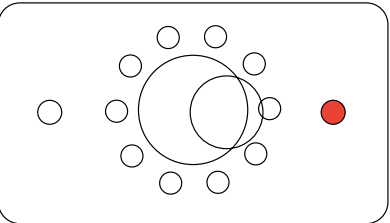
That question set off a wide and sometimes wild investigation into multiple domains of research, including:



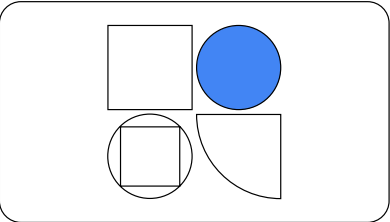
Cognitive Science



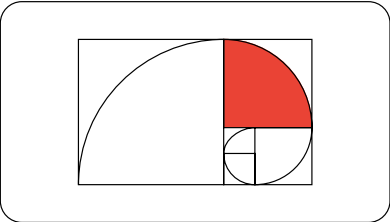
Psychology



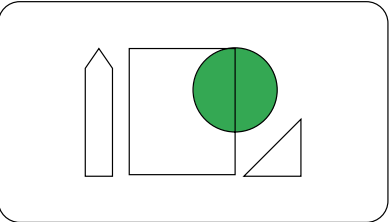
Public Health



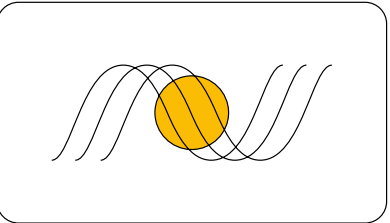
Design



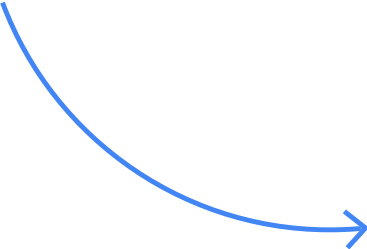
Architecture



Education



Neuroaesthetics*



**Applied neuroaesthetics, as defined by The International Arts + Mind Lab at John Hopkins University, is the scientific study of how the brain responds to the arts and aesthetic experiences to improve biological, psychological, social/cultural or spiritual outcomes for individuals or groups.*

The Answer

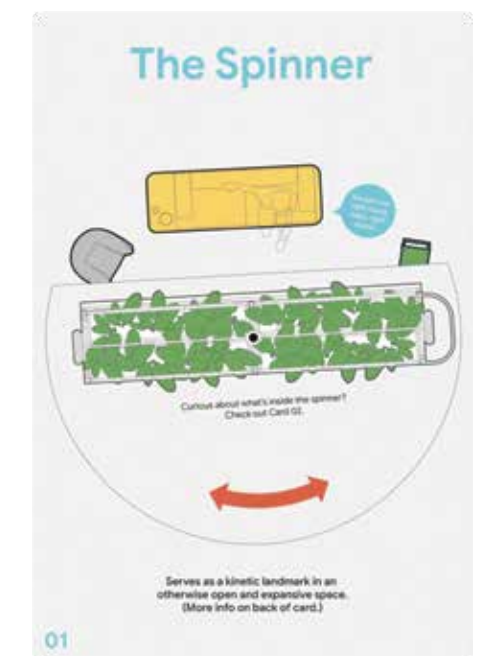
The answer — a flexible, immersive, multi-sensory environment for learning — guided the design of the Schoolhouse: a responsive building with components that both delight and deliver.

2021

The Schoolhouse

The Elements

The elements within the Schoolhouse — chosen after running creative experiments at multiple sites around the world — are simple and effortless in function and playful in form.



Permanent Pieces

While permanent pieces serve as anchors, the furniture, objects, plants, and the interior space itself are purposefully designed to motivate participants and facilitators to explore, touch, and reconfigure the space as desired.

Breakout Rooms

The breakout rooms are equally flexible: light, temperature, color, sound, and scent are all customizable, giving a sense of agency and ownership to users of the space.

User Guides

Extensive user guides were developed to familiarize facilitators with the space and train them to make the best use of components.



Whether a program calls for intimate dialogue, independent reflection, interactive large group work, or focused problem-solving, the Schoolhouse easily adapts to serve each program's curriculum and learning objectives.

Opened for learning in June, 2019, the Schoolhouse has already received prestigious design awards and enthusiastic kudos from its constituents. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the Schoolhouse continues to support the Google School for Leaders temporary transition to virtual learning, and serves as a model and inspiration for future learning spaces at Google.



World Festival
of Interiors
Inside
2021 Education
Category Winner

IIDA | NORTHERN
CALIFORNIA
chapter
2021 Honor
Award Finalist

2020 Workplace
Environment Small Winner

WIN
20 **AWARDS**
2020 Learning
Interiors Winner

The Overview

- 9000 sq. feet (including outdoor social learning space)
- Central room divides into three parts via mechanical raised curtains
- Six separate breakout rooms designed to evoke different archetypes
- Three entryways each provide a unique threshold welcoming experience
- Four large shelving units can spin to change the focal points and shape of the learning space
- Sofas, chairs, and plants on wheels
- More than 100 curated artifacts and objects (“curiosities”)
- Mirrored and reflective surfaces
- Scent, including a scented “scratch and sniff” wallpaper installation, incorporated throughout
- Outdoor space includes “edible wall” of herbs for tea-making and garnishing

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The Schoolhouse



The Inspiration

Inspiration for the Schoolhouse came from event designers, visits to corporate and academic learning sites, and multiple immersive experiences.



Legoland 4D



Art Basel



Cirque du Soleil



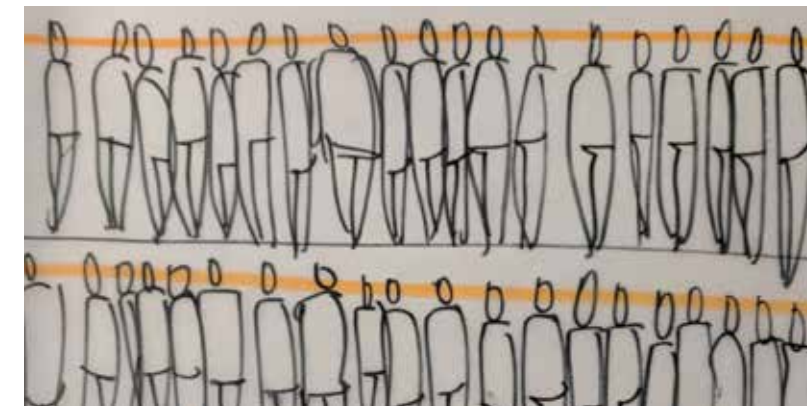
Disneyland

Legoland! An immersive “4-D” movie prompted the question: could a learning environment involve all our senses? Events and experiences like Art Basel and Cirque du Soleil—and a curated tour of Disneyland (the original immersive experience)—along with conversations with Broadway show directors and professionals highlighted the magic of stagecraft, and how to consider sets, lighting, and props.

The Process

The team’s own learning took some unusual paths.

A sketch class helped non-designers understand how to read architectural drawings.



Multiple design charrettes brought out the team’s best thinking.



A trip to the Alameda Flea Market yielded a treasure trove of thought-provoking “curiosities”.

The Experiments

Creative installations and popup experiments enlivened dozens of programs and guided many of the ultimate design decisions.

Mirrored Objects



Mirrored objects prompt reflection and awareness of the possibilities of transformation.

Rope Installation



Using a rope installation helps participants explore how the process of unraveling reveals structure.

Cell Phone Storage



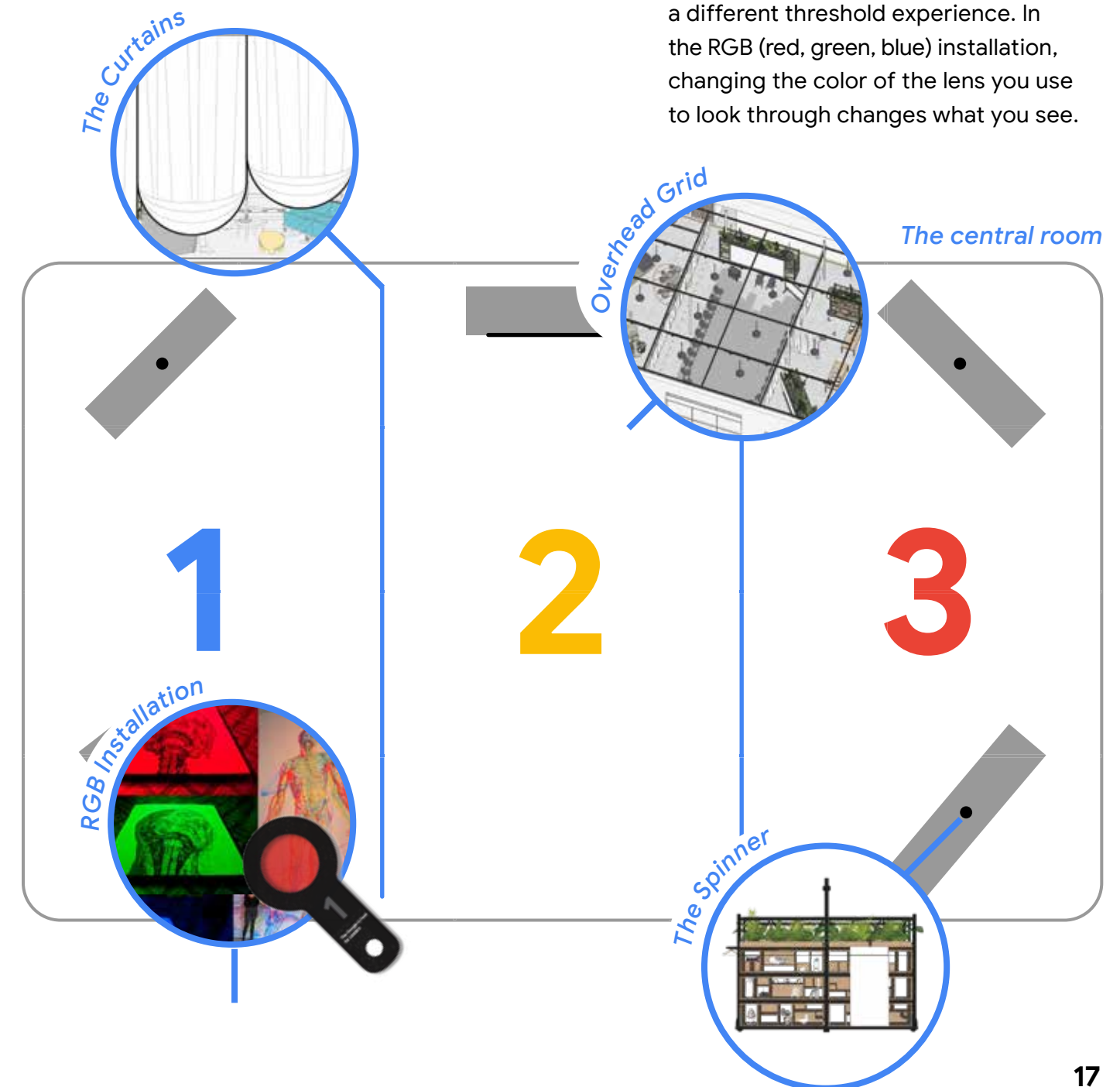
Storing cell phones safely when entering a program space encourages participants to be fully present.

Open for Learning

The central room

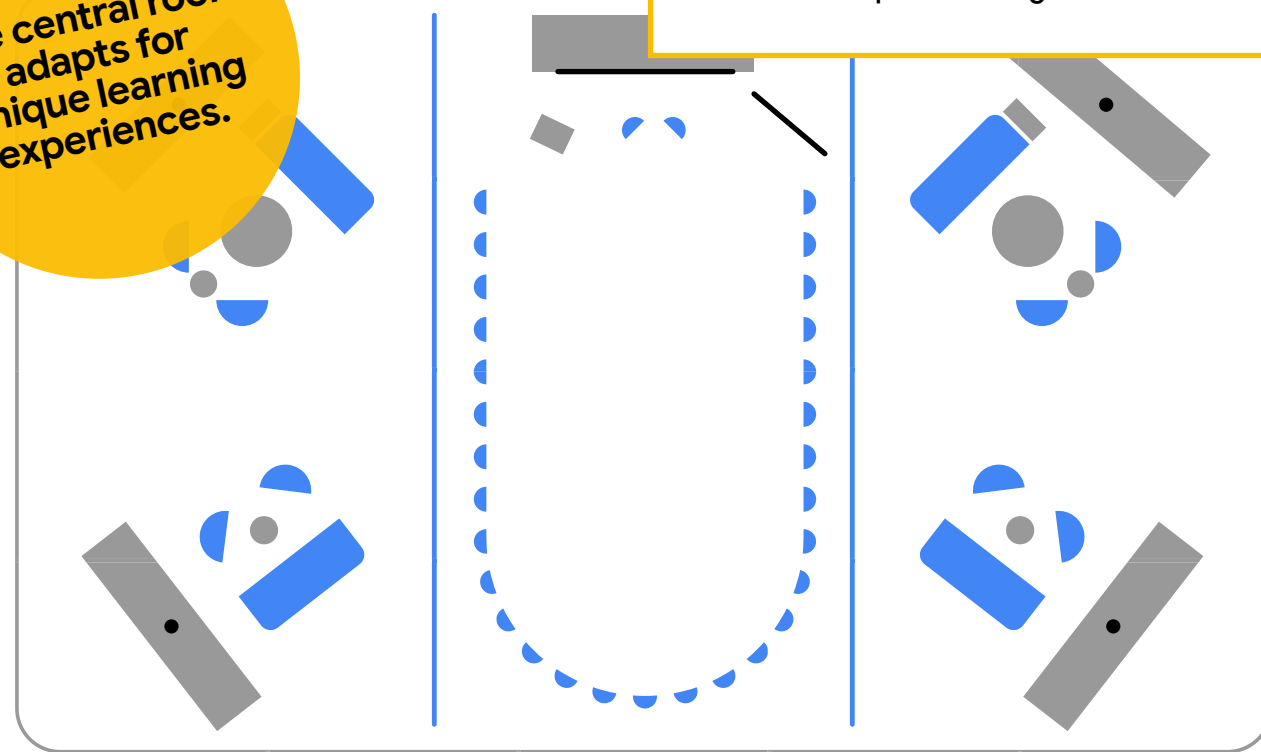
divides into [three parts](#) with [mechanical raised curtains](#). [Four large shelving units](#) spin 360 degrees to change the focal points and experience of the learning space.

Each of the [three entrances](#) provides a different threshold experience. In the RGB (red, green, blue) installation, changing the color of the lens you use to look through changes what you see.

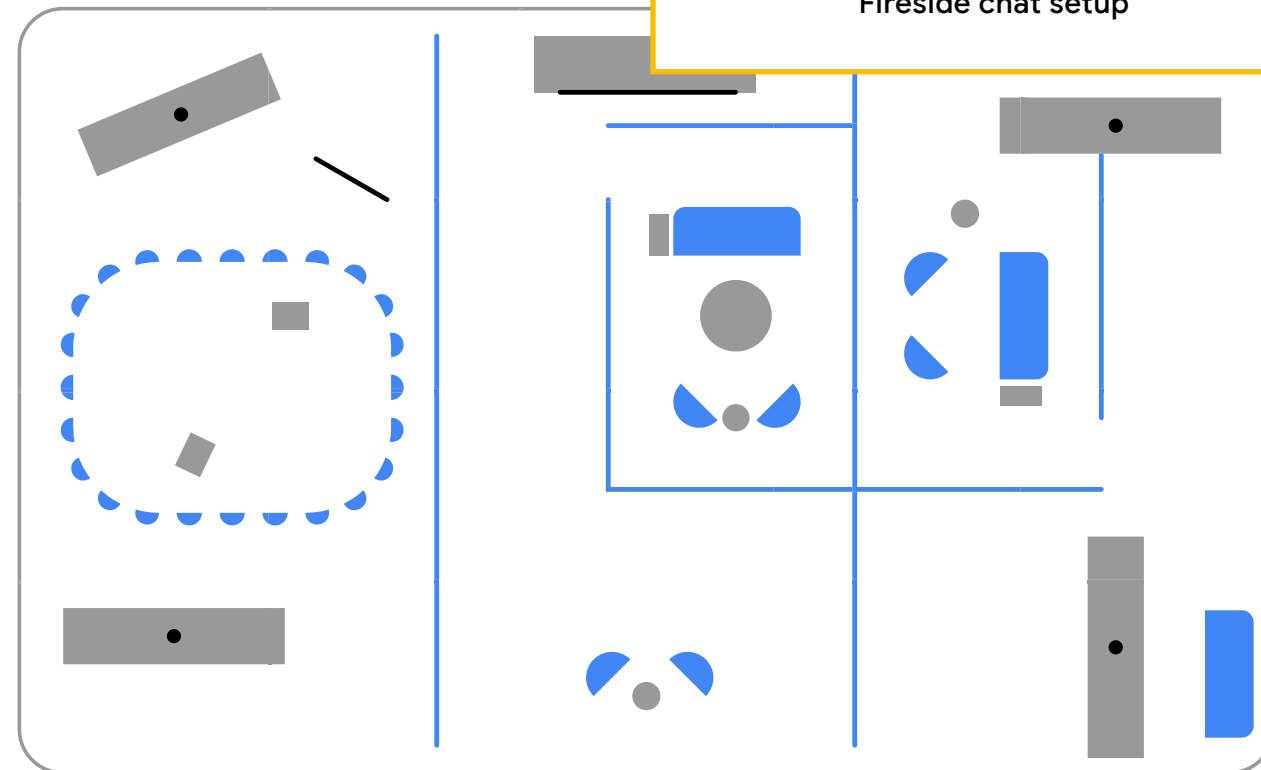


The central room adapts for unique learning experiences.

'U' setup with living room areas



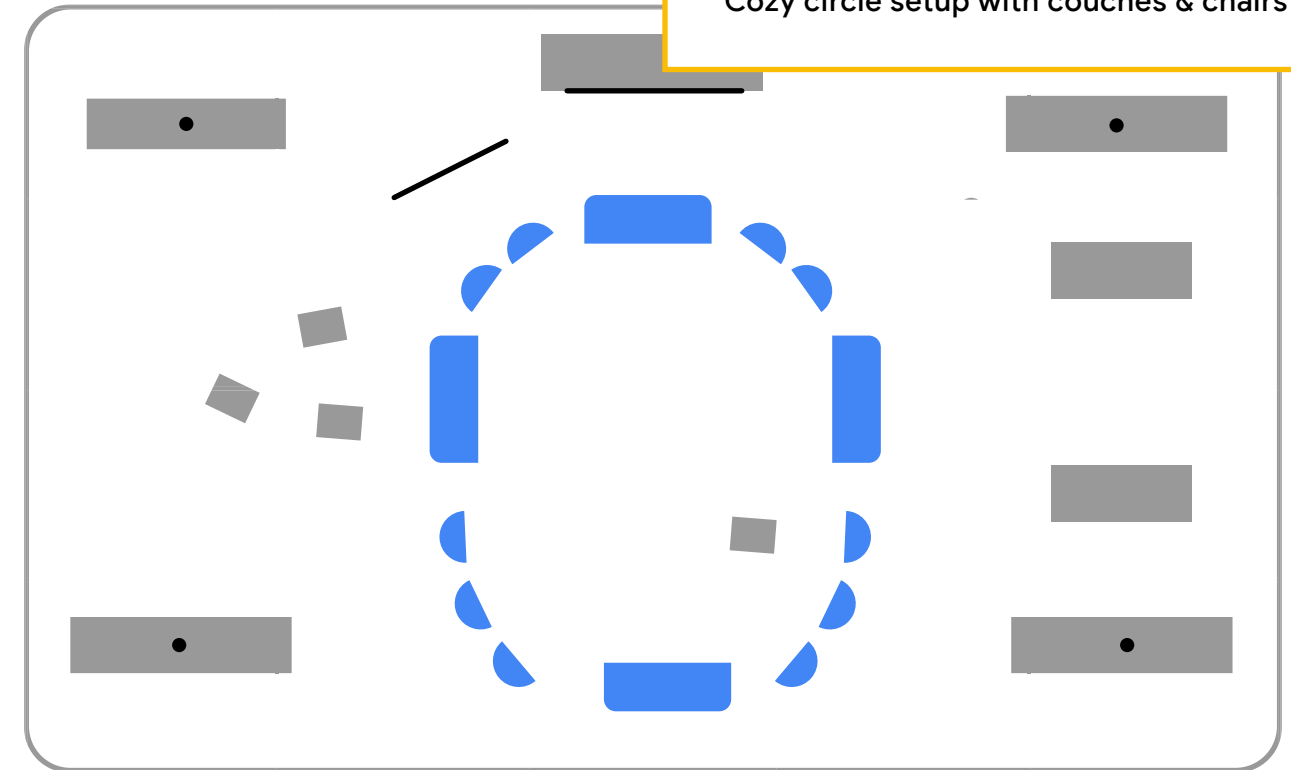
Fireside chat setup



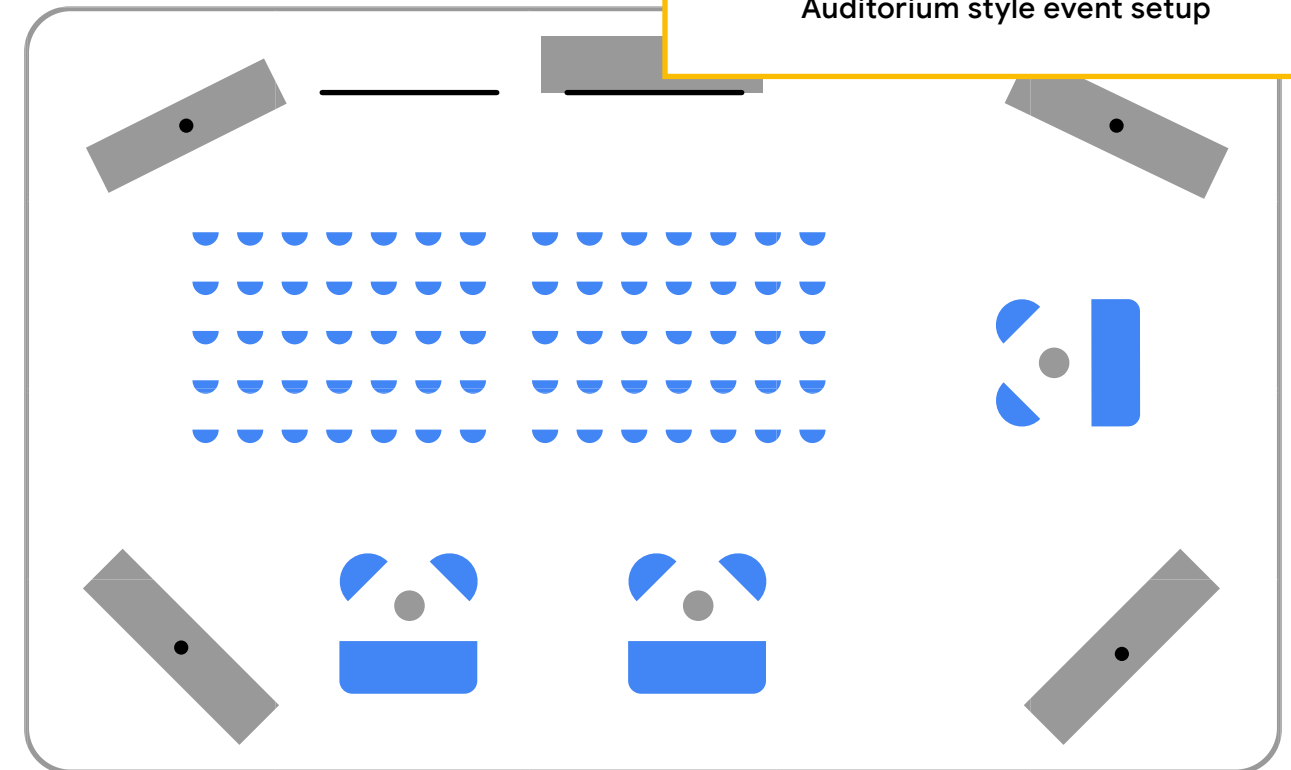
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The Schoolhouse

Cozy circle setup with couches & chairs



Auditorium style event setup



The Furniture

All the furniture was subjected to extensive professional stress-testing prior to opening.

Each of the six breakout rooms is designed to evoke qualities associated with different psychological archetypes, such as the Magician, the Explorer, or the Sage.

Program leaders can choose different groups of themed objects to inspire and provoke curiosity.

Engaging The Senses

Participants can explore scents as gateways to memory, which can influence behavior, mood, performance and creativity.



An outdoor area extends the learning space with an edible garden and flexible classroom.



The Team

Conceiving, researching, and developing the Schoolhouse was an intense effort that spanned almost two years. It involved dozens of thought partners, advisors, and consultants, and extensive testing of ideas, products, and designs. Extra special thanks go to:



Brian Glaser, Google project sponsor

Ciela Hartanov, Next Practice Innovation, Google School for Leaders • **Frederik G. Pferdt**, People Development, Google School for Leaders • **Jim Wylie**, Co-founder, Envy Events Services • **Justin Brooks**, Trainer, Google (and former Disney Imagineer) • **Justin Townsend**, Associate Professor, Broadway lighting designer • **Louis Schump**, Creative Director; **Kali Lewis**, Design Director; and **Andrew Porter**, Project/Lead Designer, Rapt Studios, architects and interior design • **Mandy Aftel**, perfume pioneer and guru, scent strategy, Aftelier • **Mathias Jakobsen**, consultant • **Michael McKay**, Vendor Management, Google • **Mimi Lien**, Broadway stage designer • **Mindy Odai**, Executive Development, Google • **Oscia Wilson**, Project Executive, Real Estate and Workplace Services, Google • **Sarah Johnston**, Broadway lighting designer • **Scott Doorley**, Creative Director, Stanford d.school • **Scott Witthoft**, consultant • **Shawna McDonald**, Brand Marketing and Communications, Google School for Leaders • **Susan Magsamen**, Executive Director, International Arts + Mind Lab Center for Applied Neuroaesthetics, Johns Hopkins University

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The Schoolhouse

What They're Saying

We seldom get the opportunity to work with a visionary client who knows what they want to achieve, has no preconceptions of how to do it, who continues to advance ideas and criteria as they're encountered in the world, and who enables real-time stress tests before the product is done. We were asked to create a learning environment that would assist in breaking down barriers between leaders, and between leaders and their teams: a space designed to make connections. The final result is as supple as the collective intellect that created it. The space is hugely successful—while also breaking every acoustic, technology, and audio / video / conference guideline Google has.

Louis Schump, Creative Director, Rapt

The Schoolhouse space completely transported me. I felt simultaneously relaxed and stimulated, and expectant of some surprise. I enjoyed the unique and roundish shapes and textures of the furniture, and both the indoor and outdoor spaces felt wonderfully expansive. It is a place that made me feel at home. I was both completely comfortable and completely engaged in our learning session.



Jeanie Fay-Snow, GSL Leadership Coach and Facilitator, & Program Participant

The Schoolhouse manages to retain all the virtues of off-site learning environments in an on-campus learning location. The space reflects multiple values: creating a safe space to foster both deep conversation and play; provoking the senses as part of the learning experience; adjusting the learning environment to meet the learning goals and the user needs; and presenting a feel of down-to-earth sophistication. It was so exciting to see all of these manifested in physical form throughout the space. When facilitating a program, it came to life in beautiful ways. It enabled the creation of an environment to address large groups, small groups, and the individual; to flex easily from intimate spaces to more formal ones, to invite lively discussions and to foster introspective reflection. It reflects the best of learning design, interior design, and brand experience together!

Ali Neiderkorn, GSL Facilitator and Coach

Working on the Schoolhouse was one of those rare moments when unbridled creativity came

Cont'd

together with smart, practical execution to create an extraordinary place. The Google lead and her team left no stone unturned, drawing inspiration from surprising but relevant fields like immersive theater, event production, and the neuroscience of aesthetics. The end result is a space that is chock-full of design innovations, while remaining intuitive and easy to use. I am proud to have contributed to such a magical and worthwhile project.

Scott Doorley, co-author of Make Space & Creative Director at the Stanford d.school

The absolute joy of teaming up on the Google Schoolhouse was getting to work with such a fantastic array of true professionals, from interior designers to creative directors, architects to futurists, coordinators to aromachologists. As a theatre maker, collaboration is a requirement of the gig, but being around such a diversity of smart, passionate, and genuinely delightful humans made me better at my job. This project helped me to crack open my creative brain in a new way and better develop my research, presentation, and improvisational skills.

Maya's approach to a whole body learning experience resonates with me to this day. I put what I learned into practice in creating our pandemic home distance learning routine, and made a full- sensory "schoolhouse" in my dining room. What could've been a frustrating disaster turned out to be an incredible success thanks to what I now know about engaging and enjoyable learning environments.

Sarah Johnston, Broadway Lighting Designer

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The Schoolhouse

The Schoolhouse that Google Built*

This is the strategist and brave project lead
That for days upon weeks did research and read
That managed the people and planted the seeds
That grew into spaces that answered all needs
That chose the designs to help learning proceed
That curated objects that all guaranteed
That new ways of seeing helped leaders succeed
That new ways of sensing added some speed
That wonder, questions, and innovation were freed
That expanded the minds and gladdened the hearts
That strengthened the purpose and united the parts
That made up the Schoolhouse that Google built.



Maya Razon, Project Lead

The conception and delivery of the Schoolhouse project was led by Maya Razon, a strategist at The Google School for Leaders within People Development (Human Resources). A seasoned facilitator and curriculum developer, she has spent much of her time at the company looking for ways to bring cutting edge research and innovation to Google's learning and development strategy.

**with apologies to Jack and the house that he built.*







The Google School
for Leaders