

## **Chicago-based Efforts at the Forefront of K-12 Design Education and Environmental Stewardship**

October 8 -- On Thursday, October 18, at 6pm, in the Millennium Park Room at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 111 South Michigan Avenue, the creators of [www.NEXT.cc](http://www.NEXT.cc) will introduce to Chicago-area artists, architects, designers, and educators a ground-breaking web-based design education program for K-12 students. NEXT combines hands-on activities with a vast array of online resources toward raising awareness of object, information, experience, and environmental design at nine scales -- from hand-sized to global.

"What we're doing with NEXT is taking kids who use the computer for gaming and turn it for them into the learning resource that it is for us," says co-creator Linda Keane, AIA, architect, environmental planner, and professor in the department of Architecture, Interior Architecture and Designed Objects at SAIC. NEXT participants access [www.NEXT.cc](http://www.NEXT.cc) at remote locations, including schools, libraries, and home, and explore design connections through writing, speaking, drawing, and modeling. NEXT "journeys" introduce vocabulary, activities, and self-assessment tools, which take students from the computer, back into their room, onto their street, into their neighborhoods to observe, explore, evaluate, connect and intervene with the built environment. Students may submit digital copies of their projects for inclusion in the NEXT Gallery, which Keane expects to be bigger than the actual site.

"What's phenomenal is the eco-system of websites this site is connected to," says Keane. "Currently 80 journeys link to more than 500 sites -- to the Louvre, to Cairo, to China, to Beijing, to Hong Kong, to Ansel Adams, to Picasso, to the World Heritage Site, to NASA, to Google Earth, to the universe. It's the freedom of technology that allows participants to connect with the rest of the world."

"Design education is basically non-existent until the college level. We decided that is way too late. We need to raise the value of design thinking, which is pervasive. We are all designers in all of the choices we make every day. The choices that we make personally affect our community, and the local affects the global. We want young people -- tomorrow's leaders -- to understand that immediately," says Keane.

At SAIC this spring, Keane will offer a seminar called the Necessity of Design Education. Offered jointly by the AIADO and Art Education departments, this course introduces environmental design education as a viable and necessary foundation for lifelong learning and urban stewardship. Participants will develop curricular strategies and collaborate on activities that encourage integrated curriculum of "art + design + environmental" project based methods of thinking and making for schools, museums, cultural institutions and alternative settings.

Understanding everyday sustainable choices empowers individuals to reduce consumption, think beyond themselves to address the greater good, initiate communal activism, and create change.

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