What makes a successful informal learning space?

Exploring Learners’ Informal Learning Space Behaviors, Attitudes, and Preferences

What was found?

DESTINATION
Where learners go to study
- On campus spaces designed for informal learning are popular
- Habit plays a part in selection of spaces, including specific seat preferences
- Proximity to formal learning session is important

IDENTITY
The ethos of the space and how it should be used
- Range of atmosphere preferences from "studies, relaxed & informal" to those typified by "buzz & activity"
- Layout of space more important than designation (e.g. signage)
- Important that spaces live up to their expectations, particularly quiet & silent study areas

RETREAT
Privacy & quiet study
- Importance placed on spaces available with no distractions & where others cannot see learners’ work
- Home offered privacy, and associated with being cozy, comfortable & being able to sit how you like
- Not all learners choosing to work individually wish to be in a quiet environment

RESOURCES
Access to technology
- Access to all forms of modern technology is important
- Plentiful and visible electrical sockets encourage & validate learners’ use of personal technologies to support learning
- Books, journals & e-journals all valued resources used alongside technology

COMMUNITY
Social interactions, support and sense of common purpose
- Social interaction is important for study & learning
- Preferences expressed for working in close proximity to friends & peers to create a sense of community
- For co-support and breaks
- Planned & unplanned serendipitous meetings
- A shared learning environment is motivational

ERGONOMICS
Work spaces & physical attributes
- Large personal work spaces a common preference, with larger tables & space to spread out personal belongings and refreshments
- Mixed preference on seating - from relaxed and comfortable to formal
- Sound levels can be a source of frustration
- Easy access to food & drink creates a homelier environment

CONVERSATIONS
Collaboration and interpersonal communication
- Learning centres often first choice for group work – viewed as neutral territory and familiar to all
- Important learners have the opportunity to talk, share ideas, discuss & debate
- Learning spaces should support interpersonal communication from both learning & social perspectives

Going forward...
There is an almost limitless combination of learning space preferences. And so going forward, librarians need to consider:
- Developing a portfolio of interrelated campus spaces which offer a coherent whole
- Delivering a coherent, but diverse range of spaces at building, floor and area level
- Creating a versatile space which encourages learners to reflect on their learning preferences and translate these preferences into space selection

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TIMELY
Just in time and on demand access to spaces & their resources
- Spaces often used for quick tasks before and between other activities as well as for longer periods of study
- Long opening hours important with 24-hour access considered essential to some learners
- Flexible booking systems essential to support planned or last minute requests
- Preference for not having to leave building for refreshments

“Have you ever noticed...”
“Nothing says success like a study session in a quiet environment”

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