

What makes a successful informal learning space?

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



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What was found?

DESTINATION

Where learners go to study

- ▶ On campus spaces designed for informal learning are popular
- ▶ Many learners prefer to work at home for independent study – others found working at home too distracting
- ▶ Proximity to formal learning sessions important

"I'm a creature of habit"

IDENTITY

The ethos of the space and how it should be used

- ▶ Range of atmosphere preferences from "studious, 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

"My own little space, no distractions"

RESOURCES

Access to technology

- ▶ Access to all forms of modern forms of technology important; e.g. PCs, printers, large screens, internet, software.
- ▶ 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 important for study & relaxation
- ▶ 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
- ▶ Shared learning environment is motivational



"I came in to revise, my friends were already here so I joined them"

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



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



"I don't have time to walk all the way across campus"

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



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

