



Classroom design and usage to aid learning

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Background

The research took place at Penryn college with a small group of high ability Year 9 students. Research took place around the school in all subject areas through a student questionnaire asking them to look at specific questions in each of their subject lessons across the school looking at the way in which classrooms are used to encourage students to develop their creativity and take ownership of their learning.

Research Question: How does a teacher’s creativity in developing and maintaining their classroom environment empower students to take ownership of their own learning?

What I did

The research focussed on student impressions of their surroundings during learning activities in lessons and how this might aid their learning in that particular subject area.

The areas of focus were:

- First impressions of the teaching space
- The way the room is decorated
- Particular focus on displays
- How the teacher uses the teaching space to aid learning
- Suggested improvements to the teaching space

When responses had been collated, these areas were then discussed with students.

Data was collected via an online questionnaire in the first instance and then this data was used to question students directly about their ideas on how classrooms can be better used so that they can take ownership of their own learning.

What I found out

In terms of first impressions, student responses reflected some key areas that had been recognised in the reading I did. These included temperature, light levels, smell and if the room seemed tidy and clean on entry.

“(The room) smells like chemicals and is either too hot or too cold. It’s too bright.”

When students described the decor in the room they tended to focus on practical issues such as clutter, student desk arrangements, seating arrangements, posters/displays and if they are relevant to the subject and proximity to play areas (noise).

“The right side of the classroom seems too cluttered with lots of books and boxes”

“The classroom is not bare even though one display board is empty, there are diagrams which help me with the subject.”

Displays were a specific focus and students felt that good displays were the simple ones that related directly to main parts of the subject matter. Students also wanted to discuss how comfortable/ uncomfortable some of the seating in classrooms was and also the fact that in most classrooms the windows were very dirty, giving the impression that it is not looked after.

“The windows are dirty and the curtains are see through, which isn’t very aesthetic.”

Students appreciate the fact that in most cases teachers at Penryn are aware of the material that they have used to decorate the rooms. They use displays and “refer to the diagrams in lessons to remind students”. Where this is not the case and displays are tatty and not referred to it has been noticed by the students.

Students discussed seating arrangement in classrooms and in most cases suggested that seating arrangement were well thought out.



“(Seating arrangement encourages good learning) the rows are easy to work on so (we are) more focussed on lessons, especially when you really care about it.”

In some cases, it was noticed that grouping students sometimes leads to distraction and in some cases seating is cramped so it is difficult to work and concentrate.

Students notice when teachers have thought about the structure of the room and where relevant equipment is stored for ease of use.

Students suggested a number of improvements to aid their own learning:

- Consult students when buying chairs for classrooms. Sometimes they are uncomfortable.
- Make sure clutter is removed from classrooms and keep working spaces clean and tidy.
- Keep displays in classrooms simple, relevant and up-to-date (replace old worn ones)
- Less things (information) on the walls.
- Clean the windows, make sure the curtains cover them for very sunny days.
- Make sure there is adequate storage for equipment and make sure it is easily accessible.

It seems to me from the information gathered and discussion we have had that student perceptions of classroom environments at Penryn strongly align with the principles of creative pedagogy: they favour spaces that are purposeful, uncluttered, cognitively manageable, and actively support learning through clear visual scaffolds and intentional design. Where environments fall short, students identify barriers not just to comfort, but to focus, engagement, and ultimately creative thinking.

It is important to link the ideas discussed in this report to creative skills necessary for students to own their own learning. The displays in classroom and out on corridors should be clear and help make thinking and learning visible. Students discussed the accessibility of resources in and around classrooms and that availability allows agency and independence meaning that students take more responsibility for their own learning. Students appreciate less clutter in their learning environment: both the unnecessary clutter of an untidy teaching space and, more importantly, a tendency to put too much learning material in classrooms which leads to cognitive overload.

What next?

- Develop strategies to implement student ideas into the design of a classroom. This has been a discussion I have had with several students in my year 8 Personal Development class. Students are desperate to be involved in the direction of their own learning. They want to be involved in decision-making but not in its current form which they perceive as being given a narrow focus by adult leaders in the school. They want to see through the whole process. The discussions focussed on student groups being given assistance by adults to highlight constraints but then given the freedom to suggest possible solutions to issues. A specific issue that was brought up was the purchase of science stools. Students find them uncomfortable and would have loved to have been given the ability to choose for themselves, obviously with specific constraints (cost, height etc.) This could be seen as a forum for students and staff to discuss further developments.
- Identify non-classroom areas of the school that could be designed for better use and allow students to take ownership of the learning, such as library, canteen, breakout areas.

Links

Hannah R (2013) The effect of classroom environment on student learning. Western Michigan Univ.

[Creative-Skills-and-Pedagogies.pdf](#)

Lenihan E (2015) Using classroom walls to create a thinking-rich environment. UKEdChat.

[The Role of a Good Classroom Environment in Learning - Teachers Guide](#)