

## **Informal Learning Spaces and the Institutional Mission**

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EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative Fall 05 Focus Session on Informal Learning Spaces

Phoenix, September 14, 2005

(This summary of remarks goes side by side with the slides that were used in the presentation.)

Twenty years ago, when I first became a faculty developer, I had the good fortune to be asked to assist Paul Young, professor of architecture at Ohio State, in doing some research on his teaching. Our partnership led to his engaging me in another inquiry of his—understanding how the built campus influenced learning. I must admit that at first I thought the topic less than compelling, but as Paul pointed out aspects of the campus landscape—inscriptions on the buildings, sculptures, an amphitheater, a portrait gallery, a building whose layers of stone are arrayed in the order in which they occur in the earth—I began to realize what he meant. Just last week, on the campus of the University of Arkansas, I was delighted to walk the paths upon which the names of all of its graduates had been inscribed over the years. I thought of this physical artifact as an inspiration to achieve for other students and pride at accomplishment for the graduates and their families.

Ten or so years after working with Paul Young, when an architecture firm asked me to talk about current developments in learning theory for the purpose of informing their design strategies, I had been primed to think about this. I talked about all the things we are still talking about: constructivist principles and the importance of active engagement and the social context. Course management systems and wireless environments were not a reality yet, but we translated the ideas about learning into implications such as movable furniture, display surfaces, and rooms that could be reoriented. We found that campus standards makers and furniture companies did not seem to be thinking along the same lines as we were. And there wasn't much of a literature base to inform us.

When I went to IUPUI, the Dean of the Faculties asked me rather sheepishly if I would assume leadership for learning spaces on campus—a responsibility that was not in my job description. He didn't realize that it was, thanks to Paul Young, an interest of mine. The previous committee had left behind a wonderful document detailing how active learning and classroom design were related. My job was to try to implement some of these ideas. I brought to this task the span of thinking that Paul originally suggested: the entire campus should say learning. Because to Paul, as well as to me, the physical space can inspire, and can constrict. It can foster our learning mission or get in the way. And this environment is not just classrooms, but shrubbery, corridors, laundry rooms. It's now routine to think about classroom design a little differently than we have in the past, but it's less common to think about those other spaces. That is why I am delighted to be here as ELI looks at informal learning spaces, for they too, help the campus proclaim that it is about learning.

I want to organize my remarks in five sections. First, to reach some understanding about what might be included under the label of “informal learning spaces.” Second, to think

about “institutional mission” and its dimensions. Third, to discuss how space and mission intersect. Next, I’d like to look at some different arrangements of informal space and what they say. Finally, I’d like to list some things I think we need to know more about, segueing into the rest of our discussion today and tomorrow.

As we look at the following photos, all taken on the campus of IUPUI, I want us to consider whether or not the places in the photos might be considered learning spaces. Ultimately, we don’t know whether one person is learning unless we use some measure to assess this, but do these students look like they might be learning? (slides)

Now, let’s consider different spaces and get your opinions as to whether these are informal learning spaces or not? First, let’s talk about outdoor spaces. What outdoor spaces might we consider as informal learning spaces? Now, corridors, adjacencies, and lobbies (slides). What about these? How about learning labs, libraries, information commons, computer labs? (slides) What about student centers, cafes, eating commons spaces? (slides) And, are residences learning spaces—on campus or off campus? (slides) [Are we talking about spaces that only we control?] What about virtual spaces—both the real estate, so to speak (page arrangement) and the capacity that the web has for enfolding people in interaction (slide)? How about faculty offices? Does any informal learning go on there? (slide) [This raises the question of whether we mean student informal learning or anyone informal learning.] What other spaces might fall under this umbrella?

What, then, do we mean by mission? Let’s consider the dimensions. We can talk about the particular mission that all institutions share: teaching, research, and service, and then we can talk about the particular emphases that different institutions share, as captured by the Carnegie Classifications, which look at Research Intensive or Liberal Arts, for example. And the intersection of these is the demographics and lifeworlds of the students.

Let’s consider a few specific examples in terms of informal learning spaces. When we think of the type of informal learning spaces most frequently used in each of these settings, what do we get? (slide and discussion)

Let’s now turn to the built pedagogy. This is a particularly apt phrase that Torin Monahan uses to indicate “architectural embodiments of educational philosophies.” (reference on slide) The meaning of this is clear to you, I’m sure. Rows of fixed seats facing forward in a facility where only the voice of the speaker at the front is amplified is an architectural arrangement that is consistent with a pedagogical philosophy that assumes that people learn by listening to an expert speaker. So, what are the built pedagogies of some of our informal learning spaces. In thinking of the built pedagogy we want to espouse, we need to think of social constructivist learning theory, as well as the demographics of our students. When we talk about learning theory, two main works come to my mind to recommend. Marilla Svinicki just last year released a wonderful book that summarizes current learning theory for higher education educators and the mainstay for years has been the NRC volume on learning (references and main points on slide). The special case of student demographics, learning needs and spaces is beautifully

summarized by Malcolm Brown in the new EDUCAUSE volume edited by Diana and James Oblinger (points and reference on slide).

Let's look at some examples.

First, seating. (slides throughout) Here is an example that now rests in a salvage yard near IUPUI. It was the lecture hall seating at IUPUI when I came. One student called it "the deviled egg plate." It provides separation between the users and has them each looking in a different direction. What's the pedagogy? Next, let's take a look at benches. Here are some lovely cedar benches, also in place when I came to IUPUI. They are bolted down to permit egress in an emergency, supposedly by order of the fire marshal, in a corridor so wide that three elephants walking side by side could probably navigate it. Again, what's the pedagogy? Here are some students making do with benches. Contrast these with ones showing the tables and chairs we now have scattered throughout campus. These move around and can be found with from 0 to 8 chairs clustered around them. What's the pedagogy? By the way, there is an interesting new discussion of seating arrangements in the new publication from the Society for College and University Planning, *In Synch*, by Lennie Scott-Webber (see [http://www.scup.org/pubs/books/is\\_ebrdls.html](http://www.scup.org/pubs/books/is_ebrdls.html)). She summarizes research about zones of intimacy and eye focus that both influence comfort and interaction.

Let's turn to corridors and adjacencies to formal spaces. (slides) Corridors are normally just thought of as places to get you somewhere instead of places where learning takes place, but look what we have here. Corridors outside classrooms are places where students must congregate. They are the places of busy exchange before and after class, both for students and faculty. Here is what can be done with a "wasted corner." And here is an example of the old versus new way of approaching adjacencies in some of our classroom buildings with wide corridors. Community partners built these spaces and we are finding that we are able to document learning gains, changes in faculty teaching approaches, and identity and pride in the campus because of these spaces. What is the pedagogy?

Look at some other examples: the computer lineup versus the cluster. (slides) Studying in the library stacks versus the café. When we think of pedagogy here, we need to also think about the NetGen characteristics—the multitasking, the social environment. And my final example will be faculty spaces. I am thinking a lot about how to make these better spaces for faculty, but let's think about students for now. Look at what a corridor looks like, what it looks like to 'hang out' to wait to see a faculty member, and then what it looks like when you are in the space. What's the pedagogy here? My latest project is to think of faculty and student spaces as a flow rather than having hard barriers. Here is a rendering of what it might be like. (slides) My hope is something akin to the spaces that are outside classrooms—that there be porches and common talking spots interspersed with workstations.

There are lots of good models of informal learning spaces on the web and the ELI page points you to many of them. One that I would like to show you before my concluding

segment is a link that I select because it tacitly acknowledges the need for informal learning spaces by its very existence. This is at the University of Michigan. See how you can find the learning spaces and their features. Very cool. (URL on slide)

I'll conclude by listing some things we still have to know about learning spaces. (slides)  
I invite you to see our spaces—we're just beginning—and thank ELI for bringing us together to discuss this most important topic.