Does the space make a difference?

Empirical retrospective of the impact of the physical learning environment on teaching and learning evaluated by the New Generation Learning Spaces Project.
5 Years, 4 Studies

Executive Summary

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Research Question

Pilot Study: Can you Evaluate the Impact of Different Spaces

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Stage 2: Evaluating the Longer Term Impact of Space on Students

Stage 2: Evaluating the Micro Pedagogical Changes in the Spatial Transition

Stage 3: Change in how Students Occupied Modalities

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Executive Summary

A resurgence in the interest in classroom and school design has highlighted how little we know about its impact on teaching and learning.

New Approach Needed

Historically, the literature has focused on the design of the building and not its actual use. Furthermore, there has been a lack of research methods capable of controlling those complex variables inherent to both education and space.

The longitudinal New Generation Learning Spaces (NGLS) project focused on providing an approach, and suite of tools to measure the pedagogical impact of different learning environments. This novel approach isolated the impact of different learning environments to then examine how they influence student and teacher activity and behaviour.

The evidence suggests that when considering the impact of the physical learning environment on learning, how it is inhabited, is at least as important as its design.

Across the four studies, it is clear that the environmental competency of the teacher, is a clear predictor on any spatial design to facilitate its intended pedagogical function.

What We Found

Keeping this in mind the empirical evidence does suggest that the learning environment can:

• Significantly influence how technologies (both digital and physical) are used, and therefore, are perceived by students.

• Increase the instance of active, collaborative, and multiplicitious nature of student-centred learning experiences.

• Affect a statistically significant enhancement of student engagement in their learning.

• On average, different classroom layout explains 7 per cent of the variation in academic outcomes in each study.

• On average, when students transition from a conventional classroom to a NGLS, their academic achievement increases by 15 per cent.

Student-centred Learning

Increased engagement

Improved academic outcomes

Communities of learning

Technologies

Teacher Environmental Competency

Pedagogy

Impact of Space

5 Years

4 Studies

Suite of empirical metrics
This partnership has devised new approaches, methods, and tools to measure how different learning spaces influence the activity and behaviour of students and teachers.

At the beginning of the partnership, the very nature of what constitutes an ‘effective’ learning environment was undergoing substantial re-imagination. Underpinning this process was the growing influence of digital technologies within education. At the time, its hypothesized potential could revolutionize how, where and with whom students learn.

As a consequence, what was considered as quality teaching and learning was challenged by shifts in pedagogies and practices to support better the multiplicitous nature of student-centred learning. However, given these significant drivers, there was scant attention in the literature regarding if, and to what extent, these re-imagined learning environments could facilitate this transformation in teaching and learning to occur.

The partnership focused on providing empirical evidence to determine if the interest and investment in contemporary or innovative learning environments actually had a positive and measurable impact on teaching and learning.

Anglican Church Grammar School, in partnership with the University of Melbourne’s ‘Learning Environments Applied Research Network’ (L EaRN) and the Australian Research Council ‘Evaluating 21st Century Learning Environments’ (E21LE) project evaluated the impact of the physical learning environment on teaching and learning.
Research Question

“What are the macro and micro effects of different learning spaces on student perceptions of their usage of technology and learning experiences, and how does this affect their engagement and academic outcomes?”
**Pilot Study**

**Can you Evaluate the Impact of Different Spaces?**

**Macro Effects**

Summary of changes in student attitudes to their learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use of Technology</th>
<th>Learning Experiences</th>
<th>Engagement In Learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Statistical significant increase:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Effectiveness</td>
<td>- Flexibility</td>
<td>- Incidence of use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Significant impact on:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Positive attitude towards learning</td>
<td>- Critical thinking</td>
<td>- Self-regulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Measurable increase in:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Effectiveness</td>
<td>- Efficiency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary of impact on academic results**

Results in Mathematics improved by **+13% IMPROVEMENT**

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**Stage 1 Study**

**Making the Case for Space: The Impact on Students**

**Macro Effects**

Summary of changes in student attitudes to their learning

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<td>1. Consistent statistical improvement in:</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Positive attitude towards learning</td>
<td>- Critical thinking</td>
<td>- Self-regulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Significant increase in opportunities for:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Behavioural engagement</td>
<td>- Collaboration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Statistically significant change:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Behavioural engagement</td>
<td>- Cognitive engagement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary of impact on academic results**

<table>
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<th>English</th>
<th>Mathematics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+17% IMPROVEMENT</td>
<td>+16% IMPROVEMENT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The study produced evidence that advanced the knowledge of learning spaces in a school setting, finding that space does matter and served to validate a robust method for exploring this topic.
Stage 2 Study

YEAR 2013
BUILDINGS Arnott, Fisher and Lanskey
SUBJECT/S English, Humanities and Mathematics
SAMPLE 22 classes, 385 students (68% participation) and 21 teachers
RESEARCH DESIGN Quasi-experimental + Single-Subject Research Design

It was found that the affordances of the NGLS design acted as a conduit to better support teachers in facilitating a wider array of pedagogical practices and active and collaborative learning modalities than those experienced in a conventional layout.

Stage 3 Study

YEAR 2014 - 2016
BUILDINGS Hayward Midson Creative Precinct
SUBJECT/S Film and Television, Design and Technology, Drama, Engineering Technology, Technology Studies, and Visual Art
SAMPLE 126 observations of 11 teachers and 14 classes
RESEARCH DESIGN Quasi-experimental + Single-Subject Research Design

Evaluating the Micro Pedagogical Changes in the Spatial Transition

METHODS LPTS Observational Metric + Learning Analytics

It was found that the affordances of the NGLS design acted as a conduit to better support teachers in facilitating a wider array of pedagogical practices and active and collaborative learning modalities than those experienced in a conventional layout.

Furthermore, there is little known of the best way to support teachers, and students, as they navigate the spatial transition. In response to this gap, this study assessed the micro changes by students and teachers as they transitioned from their conventional studios/workshops (baseline) to a new Creative Precinct (inhabitation) as well as a year beyond the move (occupation).

Macro Effects

Compared to students in a conventional space, NGLS classes

Use of Technology
- Preferred using technology
- Learning was more interactive
- Added value to their learning

Learning Experiences
- Greater differentiation
- More active and collaborative
- More creative and interesting

Engagement In Learning
- More engaged in their learning
- More positive about their effort
- Increased enjoyment

Summary of impact on academic results

- English
  - Conventional classroom: B
  - NGLS: B+. Improvement: +16%

- Humanities
  - Conventional classroom: C
  - NGLS: B. Improvement: +11%

- Mathematics
  - Conventional classroom: B
  - NGLS: B. Improvement: +19%

Evaluating the Longer Term Impact of Space on Students

Summary of impact on academic results

- English
  - Conventional classroom: B
  - NGLS: B+. Improvement: +16%

- Humanities
  - Conventional classroom: C
  - NGLS: B. Improvement: +11%

- Mathematics
  - Conventional classroom: B
  - NGLS: B. Improvement: +19%
Stage 3 Study

Change in how Students Occupied Modalities

Baseline

Inhabitation

Occupation

Mode 1 - Teacher Centred
Mode 2 - Student Centred
Mode 3 - Informal
Outside the Classroom

Stage 3 Study

Change in how Teachers Utilised Modalities

Baseline

Inhabitation

Occupation

Mode 1 - Teacher Centred
Mode 2 - Student Centred
Mode 3 - Informal
Outside the Classroom
### Stage 3 Study

#### How the Communities of Learning Changed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Baseline</th>
<th>Inhabitation</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Group</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole Class</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Groups</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Classes</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Image of students in a classroom](image-url)
Creative Teaching and Learning Cycle

Stage 3
Study
Conclusion

The aim of the NGLS project study was to derive empirical evidence to test the assumption that different spaces can have different effects on teaching and learning. It sought to test, refine and validate a novel methodology approach through its extended replication. This study has presented a set of empirical methods that can evaluate the impact of different learning spaces on teaching and learning. In this process, this study has provided empirical evidence that goes some way to reinforce the broad set of assumptions underlying the relationship between the physical space and its potential impact on teaching and learning.

However, it is clear that the NGLS by themselves are not the agents of change. The long-term success of the learning spaces movement lies in the hands of the classroom teacher. It is clear that a teacher’s environmental competency is a clear predictor of any spaces impact to facilitate its intended pedagogical function.

About the Authors

Terry Byers is the Director of Innovation in Learning at Anglican Church Grammar School.

Mr Terry Byers is interested in the effective integration of technology to best increase students’ engagement and academic outcomes. At the same time, he is uncovering ground breaking insights into the critical role that the classroom environment plays in this equation. Together, these developments have led to the creation of dynamic and responsive tools that provide teachers with data-rich visualisations. These visualisations enable teachers to better understand their pedagogical practice in technology-enabled, contemporary learning environments and how this affects student learning outcomes and gains.

Wes Imms is an Associate Professor at the University of Melbourne Graduate School of Education.

Associate Professor Imms is currently the school’s Head of Visual Art and Design Education and its Research Higher Degree Coordinator for Curriculum and Teaching.

He is the lead Chief Investigator in the E21LE ARC Linkage Project, which is being run from 2013 to 2016. Further to this, Associate Professor Imms is also the lead Chief Investigator in the ILE+TC ARC Linkage Project. The nature of this project is such that it will bring together the expertise from industry and leading schools, with the University of Melbourne’s School of Design and Graduate School of Education. It will be run in six Australian states and New Zealand from 2016 to 2019.

Credits

Researchers and Writers

Terry Byers
Anglican Church Grammar School
Wes Imms
The University of Melbourne

Architects

Brand + Slater Architects

Contributors

Elizabeth Hartnell-Young
Alastair Leighton
Victoria Leighton

Editor

Carli Holloway

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