

Changing the learning and teaching scene: staff and student evaluations of new Science learning spaces.

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With the growing impetus for increasing student-centred, enquiry-based learning in higher education, an understanding of how the organisation of physical space can shape the student learning experience is of increasing interest. This study sought to evaluate user perceptions of three newly-developed learning spaces that were designed with collaborative learning in mind, and the spaces effectiveness for encouraging enquiry-driven and/or collaborative learning pedagogies. Staff and students were invited to share their experiences (via questionnaires and interviews) of how the new large (150 seat) and smaller (24-36 seat) rooms were being utilised in terms of their own teaching and learning practices. Some staff reported changing aspects of both their teaching and assessment practices into more interactive and technologically driven approaches in response to the opportunities for flexibility that the new spaces offered. The success of these approaches has generated an increase in staff requests for the use of these rooms. Students viewed the new spaces as successfully facilitating learning, including one space that was designed for informal study. Central to the students' evaluations were concerns such as comfort, convenience, and the availability of technology. Negative perceptions cited concerns with lack of area accessibility, flexibility of furniture within each space, technological functionality, and interestingly, effective staff use of the spaces. This study highlights some strategies and spatial design features that encouraged staff to introduce or to further develop student-focussed pedagogy in their classes.