Remapping learning landscapes across campus

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Rationale of the project

• To explore and expand the ways that students and staff use different spaces as an essential part of their learning

• The body, movement, the senses are integral to learning, i.e. “embodied cognition”

• University spaces often do not recognise this: teachers feel constrained by how the space is set up, and students do not recognise the value of movement

• We are interested in finding ways for students and staff to use space differently

• This paper reports on student interviews
Types of learning are linked to uses of space

What we wanted to know

- How do students actually use campus space? Where do they go to learn?
- Does their use of space reflect an understanding that different forms of learning require different uses of space?
- What can we do to change these behaviours?
Our research method

• “Walk with” or “go along” interviews (Kusenbach, 2003) with students and staff in our 5 departments

• Combined with hand drawing of maps of their campus use
Findings: the maps
### Where do students like to learn?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Included on map</th>
<th>Selected as one of 3 favourite places</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information Commons (IC)</td>
<td>25 (89%)</td>
<td>18 (64%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diamond (Learning Commons)</td>
<td>23 (83%)</td>
<td>17 (61%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Bank (Traditional library)</td>
<td>20 (71%)</td>
<td>9 (32%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students Union</td>
<td>18 (64%)</td>
<td>4 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own department building</td>
<td>20 (71%)</td>
<td>13 (46%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>22 (79%)</td>
<td>14 (50%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings: the interviews
1. Students identify learning with places of individual, informal learning

- Maps rarely included lecture theatres!
2. Such study is often **social**

- Study is often **social**, but studying alongside other friends as much as with classmates.

- “I normally go with my flatmates... because they are on different courses to me, so I don’t get distracted... it is nice to go with people, but if they are on my course I would just be like oh what are you writing for this?”
3. Use of study space is **habitual**

- Use of study space is **habitual**, based on returning to a limited number of places, often for long periods.

- “I am really particular... first floor in that little area just behind the stairs ... I might be a bit of a stickler for habit.”
4. Students seem **reluctant to explore** different places to study on campus, partly because of the pressure of competition for space.
5. Finding, claiming, and **keeping** a space

- Finding, claiming, and **keeping** a space to work in is important and a source of stress.

- “I learnt when to come in... the first couple of years it just seemed there was always a thousand people here and you were the only person who didn’t have a seat”.
6. For favourite places to study emphasis was on the **shared spaces**

- For favourite places to study, apart from home, emphasis was on the **shared spaces** like the IC and Diamond.
- Departmental space was important, but not where departments were in temporary accommodation.
7. Apart from at home, students rarely study off campus
8. Students seem to be battling for concentration

- Students seem to be battling for concentration: they try to use cues such as books, computers and seeing others working to help them concentrate.
- There was a mixed pattern of keeping connected and turning off phones etc. to aid concentration.
9. There is a strong sense of safety and student ownership

- There is a strong sense of safety and student ownership of spaces like the IC and Diamond, but that did not seem to make them feel they could reconfigure furniture to suit them.

- “I am not bothered, I will just leave my laptop... no one is going to take [it]... I can just leave my paper and stuff because I just don’t see why anyone would take it. It is like quite a trusting environment”.
10. There was some sense that **certain spaces** were better for certain tasks

- There was some sense that **certain spaces were better for certain tasks**, but this was not very fine grained, perhaps because of competition for space.
11. Stuff still matters

- **Stuff still matters**: movement is still partly shaped by the need to carry a computer and books.
Conclusions and actions

• Students do not see the lecture theatre as a place where they learn!

• Their choice of space is quite habitual and static

• Perhaps we need to do more in the lecture to prompt reflection

• Can we find ways to encourage students to explore more and find different spaces for different learning tasks?
Reflections on the method

- Walk with interviews and maps good for finding out about how students use campus space
- Some practical difficulties such as managing sound quality on interview recordings
- Time consuming
Thanks for your attention... do you have any questions?