Ludic Engagement and Collaboration in Social Learning Space

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Learning Space

• At the age of strong Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) research agenda considering higher education campus spaces for learning requires seeking a more general definition of how a learning environment should be understood.

• The problem on the field is that the term “learning environment” is widely used but rarely defined (Abualrub, Karseth & Stensaker 2013).

• In general the definitions on learning environments seem to purposelessly decouple the subject (learner) and the institution perspective.
Learning Space

• For our needs learning environment is defined as a combination of physical, mental and social elements, where learning takes place:
  – Physical (buildings, environment, equipment),
  – Mental (cognitive, affective aspects),
  – Social (interaction, relations) (Finnish National Board of Education 2004).

• When considering higher education campus space, the learning environment is a learner-defined mental structure reflecting the institution-specific academic learning culture.
A purpose-built informal Social Learning Space (SLS) is a strategy to improve student and staff commitment by supporting active learning, social interaction and sense of belonging (Matthews, Andrews & Adams 2011).

Can spaces transform University student and staff identity by driving adoption of certain practices and culture?
• Playful environments for ludic engagement is a means to break away from norms and hierarchies. Designing the space to incite ludic engagement (Gaver et al. 2004) is a way to support curiosity, exploration and aesthetic appreciation. The aim is to support open collaboration by enabling users to find one’s own meaning and uses for a space.

• OASIS is a social learning and research space at the University of Tampere with designed affordances (Gibson 1986) for ludic engagement and collaboration.

• The design strategies are for supporting playful, open, informal and opportunistic use.
Playful

- Playfulness is ideal for breaking conventional learning and inciting creativity - play itself is a powerful learning method.
- Designing for ludic engagement is a way to thwart overly formal or utilitarian approach towards inventive use and creative learning.
Open

- Creating an open learning culture can prove delicate and the space should advertise openness any way it can.
  - Not only is equal interaction within the space a requirement but between people in it if ideas and information are to be shared casually.
Informal

• Institutionally planned (formal) or unplanned (informal) use of spaces.
  – Lectures, silent study vs. e.g. group work, collaborative ideation.

• Mandatory or interest-based learning?
  Better part of human learning is un-formal and informal by nature.
Opportunistic

- The student or staff member has an "opportunistic" mindset of the SLS.
- Opportunistic use is informal, sudden, unplanned and takes place with the support of resources that happen to be available.
  - Supporting Bringing Your Own Device (BYOD) culture.
Studying the emergent culture

• What are the learning practices and cultures being adopted?
  – In which way are they playful, open, informal, opportunistic?
Early findings and experiences

- Based on the feedback of test sessions and from occasional visitors of the yet-not-opened space the design details were tweaked concerning physical (clothing racks), technological (instructions for the devices) and social (rules and guidelines).
- A survey one year prior the space found contradictory expectations:
  1) Expectation of the space to be dynamic and lively and
  2) Expectation of the space to be quiet and relaxing.
  3) Concerns were raised for the openness of the space. This was considered in the communication plan.
Final thoughts

• The OASIS SLS seeks to advocate learning as a general and dynamic human condition: not as formally initiated studying activity for goal-attained studying activity but as a goal itself.
• OASIS provides interesting possibilities to study SLS solutions in connection with ludic engagements and collaboration in a true Living Lab environment.
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