

### LSC Open Conversation #3: What Have We Learned About How and Where Virtual Learning Happens and What's Next? – July 21, 2021

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#### Notes from the chat

- What did we learn? That is a timely question. We all had to address the issues as they surfaced, and we had to forget about “standards” during emergency response. Now we have time to reflect on what is becoming “best practice.” In thinking about technologies and learning spaces, we must not forget to give attention to informal spaces, to specialized spaces, to typical classrooms. What have we learned? What have we learned about a virtual informal learning space? What does it look like?
- Might we be thinking about a *wework* space for learning? A spoke and hub space? A living room concept scattered throughout as a place for stopping by, plugging in, learning? Something as simple as a Slack Channel for learning—for stopping by, plugging in, and learning?
- What are the signs and early signals that an informal virtual space is needed? We have all attempted informal space design and know that students want a more “home” environment. Can we imagine something like Slack ever having an augmented environment, Avatar classmates?
- On a few smaller campuses, we are seeing the campus prioritize wireless hotspots to support physical gatherings. What is needed is wireless, power, comfortable and adjustable seating and whiteboards, individual cable spaces, full video connectivity beyond my laptop. Access to food. Access to daylight—if inside, views to the outside. There should be a varied scale of enclosures and openness to support diverse preferences. Think of a living room lounge. Admittedly, outdoor writable surfaces would be an interesting challenge.
- Maybe need places to Zoom, meaning that it is OK for students to speak and listen without disturbing others. Some campuses have scattered outdoor writable surfaces, something like being back to chalkboards, to “old-school” classroom design now with biophilic aspects.
- Thinking of a “job description” for an informal (perhaps outside) space for virtual learning, there should be easy access to a coffee bar. It should be a space where all users can navigate and access the tools they need (which will shapeshift throughout the day) with the personal devices and platforms learners are most comfortable using—phone or laptop, chats or Zooms or google docs, etc. There should also be spaces that are private “private sound spaces.”
- What works in realizing such spaces is having students involved in the design process, to build a sense of ownership of the spaces. What is important here is thinking about *how* we design (not what we design) if our spaces are to succeed into the future. Perhaps take the model of Starbucks—as offering what is needed.
- A question: Do our faculty now have the skills (new skills) that we will be able to leverage something like this on our campuses? Have our faculty gained a new level of technology expertise to be able to imagine and realize such technology-enhanced informal learning spaces? I see requests for different kinds of classrooms affordances, more spaces for informal learning, technologies enabling such learning.
- As a faculty member, I miss the engagement and being in the room with students when the “aha” moment happens. Yet, as a faculty member, I am totally excited to realize I am no longer limited to the schedule or the location—when and where—learning will happen. If I want to “fly in” as an expert, it’s a Zoom invite. As a consultant, I see many faculty not wanting to go back to the commute, but also not wanting to give up their office.

- I think we need to strive to make change as slowly as we can without being unresponsive. This is such a moving target. I've been reading lately about agile design, about how we can rapidly prototype, gather feedback and have our spaces evolve along the way.
- Yes, prototyping is absolutely key. We should accept that the classrooms we now have are already the minimum viable product. What do we know about how something like Digital Canvas can be (is being) used "now" more effectively than it was used than before?
- We should also remember that when we put all the bells and whistles in one or two spaces, you are creating an inequity in the learning environments between students that have easy access to those spaces and those who do not. Is there a way that faculty could re-create their dining room setup for virtual learning in the classroom, where in-person instruction could be setup differently? This would seem to be possible now that more faculty are entering into a teaching/learning space with more "tech" on their person that they are already comfortable using.
- I think it will take looking back at the changes we've been making to get to "here" and invest the time in assessment to learn what we've learned. I also think it is important to designate one or two "sandbox" spaces for adding more bells and whistles to explore how the more forward/advanced echelons. Think of a co-working space with no instructor at the head of the room; it would have sub-spaces for being co-located while being separate. It would offer continuum of in-person and virtual engagement in a diversified (not centralized) configuration. It would not all have to be "high-tech." It could be an augmented active learning room. It could be a series of active learning spaces where virtual members are an equal part of the class. It could like a digital campfire. We should also be thinking of adjacencies of informal and formal spaces for learning, of spaces where people can interact, that promote inclusivity.
- We don't have students in this discussion. We need to be learning from the learners that we are designing for. I keep paraphrasing Ghandi: "*There go the students, I shall follow them for I am their teacher*" –space designer, academic technologist.
- It is curious to see how the experience of online courses will evolve in in-person learning environments. The pandemic-forced movement from the physical to the virtual. Now we must give attention to how the physical learning spaces will evolve based on what we have learned/are learning as virtual spaces are evolving.
- *About a job description: Final Thoughts.*  
Part of the job description should be that there will be an authentic experience of place. One of our clients says of their campus: *Everyone who steps on our campus learns something.* How can that ethic be applied to the informal indoor/outdoor learning spaces that we have been discussing?