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Opinion Article

The environmental psychology of teaching and learning

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DESCRIPTION

This beautiful portrayal of a classroom at the fictional Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry incorporates three key concepts from teaching and learning environmental psychology. To begin with, all learning occurs in a physical context with measurable and visible physical qualities. Students are inundated by environmental information whether they are seated in a huge lecture hall, beneath a tree, or in front of a computer screen. Specific objectives in the setting, such as armchairs, scarves, and teacups, grab the students' attention, and they constantly assess ambient qualities such as the light from the lights, the fragrance from the kettle, and the warmth from the fire. Students are surrounded by environmental information in any learning setting, yet only a tiny portion of it forms the sights and sounds of education.

Second, pupils do not passively touch, see, or hear; they actively feel, look, and listen. Students' ability to receive and interpret incoming information is limited, and they cannot attend to all of the environmental information that is assaulting them at any given time. Students pick information for consideration using automated and regulated methods. They piece together bits of information from the bottom up and apply previous notions and assumptions from the top down to try to grasp what they perceive. Because it deviates from expectations created via past experience, a classroom with round tables and soft armchairs may appear weird. Students may choose to focus their attention on specific objectives in the learning environment that are more interesting, significant, or new to them than others. It may be the instructor's captivating chemical presentation for some. Others may be influenced by the gleaming crystal ball on the shelf. Students control their limited cognitive resources in every learning environment by actively picking environmental information for further examination and utilizing existing knowledge structures to interpret this information in previously successful ways.

Third, physical features of learning settings can have an emotional impact on students, with significant cognitive and behavioral repercussions. Although emotional responses to environmental stimuli vary greatly between persons and activities, most students would likely find studying difficult in a suffocating hot classroom. Environments that generate favorable emotional reactions, on the other hand, may lead to not just improved learning but also a strong emotional attachment to that location. It has the potential to become a location where students like learning, go when they want to study, and recall fondly when they reflect on their learning experiences. Even as we build yet another enormous lecture hall and try to cram our students into crowded, noisy, and unpleasant locations, we aim to provide such places for our students to learn in higher education. Some study spaces are clearly more pleasant and provide fewer distractions than others. Physical qualities that create discomfort in any learning setting are likely to obstruct learning; surroundings that promote pleasant emotional states are likely to assist learning and the formation of place attachment.

Environmental, educational, human factors (engineering), and social psychology are the disciplines of psychology that are most directly related to classroom design and learning settings. Previous study on the effects of light, temperature, and noise on learning has given some predicted outcomes that are handled by standard classroom design. Inadequate light, excessive temperatures, and loud noises—variables kept within acceptable levels in most college classrooms—appear to have a negative impact on learning. Other findings, on the other hand, indicate the learner's and learning environment's frequently complicated, nuanced, and unexpected interplay. Years of study into the impacts of environmental factors on human thoughts, feelings, and actions has revealed that other variables frequently temper the effects of environmental variables. Weinstein2 found in a review of the research on educational environments that environmental factors can have an indirect

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impact on learners and that the impacts of diverse physical settings are frequently dependent on the nature of the activity and the learner. Distracting sounds, for example, appear to reduce response time and deteriorate performance more in older vs. younger adults and for introverts more than extraverts.

There isn't as much research on the influence of information technology on learning settings. Both directly and indirectly, the existence and implementation of technology alters the learning environment. The increased presence of personal, networked devices (for example, wireless laptops and cellular phones) in the classroom, the migration of course content to the Web and the subsequent transition in classroom activity from information delivery to collaboration, and the increasing importance of virtual learning environments are all discussed in this chapter.