
Why language centers need physical spaces

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Résumé

In 2003, Garrett asked whether a language center required physical space. She concluded that the answer was "yes" because students prefer it as a study environment and teachers prefer to teach where they have staff nearby who can help with technical problems. Thirteen years later, these reasons still ring true, but may be insufficient given that many of the resources that students and faculty previously used at the language center are now available from anywhere via personal digital devices. This has led to an upheaval in the usage and purpose of the physical spaces of language centers.

In this presentation, I argue for the importance of the physical spaces of language centers for several reasons. First, I provide evidence of the ways language centers spaces are used in the American context (Kronenberg & Lavolette, 2015). Note that these data indicate that purely virtual language centers are not yet prevalent in this context. Some of the uses of the physical spaces of centers that encourage and improve language learning are testing, tutoring, teaching interactive language classes, screening films, providing technical support and professional development workshops, loaning physical technology and books, and group and individual study and project work. I also provide anecdotal evidence and suggestions of other useful language center activities that require a physical space, such as game nights for various languages (e.g., Scrabble and Spot-It in various languages), extensive reading clubs and material collections, other language club events, and language faculty writing groups and office hours. In particular, I provide evidence for the usefulness of games (e.g., Sykes & Reinhardt, 2012) and extensive reading in language development and increasing the motivation of students to continue learning a language (e.g., Krashen, 2007). These social and pedagogical uses of language centers will help to ensure their relevance as physical spaces, even while other resources are provided online.

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Krashen, S. (2007). Extensive reading in English as foreign language by adolescents and young adults: A meta-analysis. *The International Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, 3(2), 23-29.

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Sykes, J. & Reinhardt, J. (2012). *Language at play: Digital games in second and foreign language teaching and learning*. Series on Theory and Practice in Second Language Classroom Instruction, J. Liskin-Gasparro & M. Lacorte, series eds. New York, NY: Pearson-Prentice Hall.

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