Student Course Attrition and Perceptions of Engagement in relation to Classroom Learning Environment: A Mixed Methods Study

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Abstract (300 words):
Student attrition in higher education settings has been an ongoing problem with urgency increasing with shifts in enrollment and dwindling eligible student populations in undergraduate education. In an effort to decrease student attrition and enhance the student learning experience, one higher education institution incorporated two learning studios to add to their traditional classrooms already available. This study looks at the correlation between learning environment (traditional versus learning studio) and the rate of student attrition ($n=3926$). No significant relationship was found with a phi correlation coefficient ($\phi = .021$) between these variables, but the sample was further investigated with a qualitative survey ($n=36$) to determine perceptions of higher education students two environments regarding course retention/attrition. Ten participants completing the survey reflected on the traditional classroom and 26 students reflected on the learning studio environment. Themes from the qualitative survey centered on increased student sense of belonging in the learning environment, differences in room configuration based on environment, student participation increases in the learning studio, and increased rapport with the instructor in the flexible learning studio space. Connection to the theoretical framework of Sociocultural Learning Theory as well as recommendations for future research will be articulated as well.
• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Lori Cooper is a full-time faculty member at Wilkes University in Wilkes-Barre, PA with experience teaching undergraduate, master’s, and doctoral students. Her background in teaching stems primarily from the early childhood and primary grades, as she taught in public schools, military childcare, and prekindergarten, as well as administered in a Head Start program. She currently teaches doctoral courses in Educational Leadership and develops coursework in social emotional learning and school safety. She has conducted research relevant to teacher burnout and efficacy related to student social emotional learning as well as the impact of learning environment on higher education student attrition. Cooper holds a Master of Education degree in Early Childhood Education from Cameron University in Lawton, Oklahoma as well as a Doctor of Education degree in Curriculum and Instruction from Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia. In her free time, Cooper serves her community on the local school board and in various capacities in her church.

Karen Frantz Fry is an associate professor at Wilkes University, Wilkes-Barre, Pa. She teaches in the school of education’s undergraduate and doctoral departments. She earned her Ph.D. in Human Development with concentration in Educational Leadership from Marywood University, Scranton, PA in 2012. She holds K-12 Principal’s certification and her Letter of Superintendent from Bucknell University, Lewisburg, PA, a Master’s Degree in Behavioral Disorders and certification as a Reading Specialist from Bloomsburg University, Bloomsburg, PA and a bachelor’s degree in Teaching Mentally and Physically Handicapped (Birth-21) from Bloomsburg University. With over 35 years of professional training and teaching experience, Dr. Frantz-Fry has taught numerous courses within the field of education. Her primary research interests include leadership, engagement, inclusionary practices and development of professional development school partnerships, especially related to students with disabilities. Dr. Frantz-Fry is active in her church and serves on the Corporate and local Board of Directors for the YMCA. She also serves on the Board of Directors for the local Kiwanis Club.