Low-density Labs

Conduct an Internet search for images of "computer labs". Notice the number of images you find of rooms containing many computers arranged side-by-side.

It would appear that there is a certain attraction to having large labs with many computers in a school. Parents often measure the value of the school by its facilities and in less privileged communities access to ICT in the school is a very big factor when selecting a school for their children. The attraction to large computer labs may reflect the parents' perceptions of what the lab can offer i.e. training in computers = a job after school, which is mostly an incorrect assumption anyway. Parents do not easily understand or appreciate the value of good teaching and learning in rooms equipped with fewer computers.

Whereas computer labs are built to most closely achieve a 1:1 computer:student ratio in the venue, low density labs are designed to make space for a variety of activities that do not require the computer while making computers available to small groups. Most typically a 1:3 or 1:4 ratio may be the result. The actual room size is usually no different in a school. In fact sometimes "learning labs" of this nature are integrated into the classrooms.

Low density labs such as this are often not called computer labs, but a range of names such as "learning lab", "collaboration lab" or "media lab". This more accurately reflects what kind of learning activities take place in these venues.

The images below show larger rooms because most are of facilities at universities. Ignore the room size (which is not necessary) and imagine the activities that could take place in such low density labs. It is important to imagine activities (such as small group discussion) in which ICT is consulted as a resource and where ICT clearly is not and cannot be the object of the study or the primary medium for curriculum delivery.

As you look at the images below consider the following questions:

- What kinds of learning activities are possible in these venues that would not be as easily achieved in high density computer labs?
- What are the restrictions on learning in such a venue?
- How does this type of venue make it easier for teachers to engage with learners and learners with learners?
- How are classroom management issues likely to be different in such a venue (when compared to high density labs)?

Source: http://www.uq.edu.au/nextgenerationlearningspace/the-learning-lab

Source: http://per.lite.msu.edu/pics/collaborative.jpg

Source: http://www.wharton.upenn.edu/Innovation/images/learning_lab.jpg

Source: http://bestfurnitures.org/computer-lab.html

Source: http://www.wssurams.com/information/academic_athletic_services