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Forming spatial habits in the wild: Examining stabilization in classroom seating arrangements

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Abstract: Previous research suggests that individuals tend to form spatial habits (i.e., placing objects in consistent locations in space) when interacting with objects in the environment (Zhu & Risko, in press). However, it remains unclear how such spatial habits develop over time. One hypothesis suggests that spatial habit formation may involve a process of stabilization whereby individuals' spatial behaviour becomes progressively fixed over time. We examined this hypothesis by tracking students' seating behaviour in a classroom over the course of 12 weeks. Although individuals' overall seating choice tended to cluster near where they initially sat, we did not find evidence that seating behaviour stabilized over time. However, a significant curvilinear relation was found between seating choice and time such that seating choice near the beginning and end of the 12-week period were more varied than those in the middle. Implications of this study for understanding spatial habit formation will be discussed.