

Teaching and Learning with Space in Mind

One of the key issues identified in the Learning Landscape research is the importance of designing the project brief for a new learning space.

Key to a successful brief is the way in which best educational practice is articulated spatially, and the ways in which these educational practices are supported by the most efficient and effective learning spaces.

Despite the enthusiasm for the development of new teaching and learning spaces in higher education, the relationship between effective undergraduate teaching and learning and innovative new spaces is not well understood.

This lack of understanding is perpetuated by the limited amount of research in this area (Temple, 2007: 4). The lack of research may be one reason why there is resistance to change among academics in Higher Education (Temple, 2007: 49).

While writing on teaching and learning in HE is aware of issues of 'context' and 'setting', it largely ignores any direct engagement with issues of space or spatiality (Jamieson, 2003, Temple 2007: 21). This is apparent from a brief review of some of the most important work on effective teaching and learning practices in Higher Education (Ramsden 1992, Gibbs 2002, Meyer and Land 2003).

This Teaching and Learning with Space in Mind tool is designed to deal with some of these shortcomings by:

- Encouraging academics to make use of the literature on effective teaching when designing new teaching and learning spaces.
- Supporting a sense of spatial imagination and a heightened consciousness about the importance of space in the teaching and learning process. It is clear from research that there is a lack of tools to facilitate this process and, therefore, there is a pressing need to create tools that are linked closely to the most effective forms of teaching and learning.

The Teaching and Learning principles for effective teaching that form the basis for this tool have been synthesized from key approaches established through research into effective pedagogical practices in university teaching. The principles are further supported by the work that has been done as part of the Learning Landscape research project, including an engagement with the principles of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970) .

These most effective forms of teaching and learning are not presented as a definitive list, indeed colleagues are encouraged to produce their own most effective practices based on their own practices and research.

The activities described by this tool provide staff with the opportunity to discuss the relationship between pedagogy and the design of learning spaces in Higher Education so as to develop a common understanding among key stakeholders.

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Key Pedagogical Principles:

- **Student as Producer: Collaborative and engaged teaching – supporting a paradigm shift**

Recent research shows that teaching and learning in higher education is going through a paradigm shift. In the 1950s Universities were characterised by the production of knowledge in which teaching played an important but secondary status. By the mid 1990s universities were becoming student centred with a focus on the student as learner and the learning environment. This focus on the learning environment lies at the heart of the learning landscape. But now the learning landscape is changing again, the focus is not so much on the student as learner, but the notion of student and teacher as collaborators, with the student capable of producing academic knowledge of value and substance. This principle includes problem-based and enquiry-based learning, but is best captured by the notion of research-based teaching. This move to a closer alignment between teaching and research is confirmed by the Learning Landscapes research and the new learning and teaching spaces that are being designed.

QUESTION?

The Learning Landscapes in Higher Education is being transformed from student centred teaching and learning towards a topography within which undergraduate students are being seen as collaborators in production of knowledge of value and substance. In what ways is this paradigm shift being reflected in new social learning spaces?

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- **Critical Pedagogy: Diversity, Difference and Dissensus – space as social science**

The growth in the numbers of international students and the massification of higher education means universities in the UK must now be able to accommodate very different kinds of student populations. This issue of accommodation means that students feel not only safe, comfortable and secure, but that differences among and between students needs to be recognised in ways that can enhance their educational experience. The notion of learning landscape is key to this issue as it can provide a holistic understanding of the needs of a wide variety of students and how those needs can be satisfied. In addressing those needs the learning landscape must take into account not only how students learn, but the social contexts within which learning takes place. Key to designing social learning spaces includes an understanding of the social logic of the spaces within which teaching and learning takes place. These social logics can be consensual but they can also reflect dissensus about the nature and purpose of higher education. The most instructional work in this area is informed by educational psychology, human geography and the sociology of space and spatiality¹.

QUESTION?

Academics are used to debating the ubiquity of power point as a presentational tool; but we are not so used to debating the ways in which classroom design supports particular social relations of power. How might teaching and learning spaces be designed so as to be more aware of issues of power in relation to gender, race and class?

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¹ See supporting paper, extract from Pragmatics of Place tool – Learning Landscapes and Critical Pedagogy: Space as Social Science

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- **Reward and Recognition: Student Feedback and Assessment – encouraging intellectual engagement**

Research into effective teaching and learning recognises the importance of the ways in which staff respond critically to student work. Research is ongoing into the most effective ways of providing students with informed and critical commentaries on their work. A recent manifesto for the sector argues that assessment standards are socially constructed so there must be a greater emphasis on assessment and feedback processes that actively engage both staff and students in dialogue about standards. The manifesto suggests that it is when learners share an understanding of academic and professional standards in an atmosphere of mutual trust that learning works best. These relationships of trust should be underpinned by assessments that provide various types of recognition and reward, academic solidarity, generosity, and intellectual engagement.

QUESTION?

The Aske manifesto on assessment and feedback has six principles for effective assessment and feedback. None of these principles mention space. How might the principles established by the Aske manifesto be expressed spatially? (<http://www.brookes.ac.uk/aske/manifesto.html>)

References

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- **Solidarity: Student Leadership - managing teaching and learning spaces**

The issue of student leadership is becoming increasingly important in the HE sector. The issue is related to the government's intention to develop a new style of politics and citizen engagement within which the student voice is not only heard, but amplified. Sectoral level research has found that student representation works well at the institutional level, but below that level there is a variability in effectiveness. A range of studies and programmes have been set up to support students in developing their representation skills and so enhance their engagement with decision making processes in their universities. The Learning Landscape research has confirmed work done elsewhere in the sector that is critical of the levels of student engagement and the support that is provided by universities. The Learning Landscapes research has identified the importance of finding ways to amplify the student voice, and to develop ways of working with students by giving them responsibility for the management of learning spaces.

QUESTION?

Students are not very knowledgeable about the design of teaching and learning spaces; nor are they very interested in teaching spaces so long as they are comfortable and clean. Why then should we seek to engage with them on this matter?

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- **Academic Commons: Technology and the classroom – open, networked, and connected**

The Learning Landscapes is set within the context of technology-rich spaces: connecting the virtual and the physical and everything in between (Dugdale 2009). There is considerable research evidence on the effectiveness of technology as a way of enhancing teaching and learning and the student experience, as well as research into the most effective ways of designing teaching and learning spaces to accommodate best practice in ICT (JISC, EDUCAUSE). Recent studies in HE have focussed on the potential for teaching and learning organised around notions of commons-based peer production i.e., ways of co-ordinating intelligence and information through the internet, into meaningful projects without traditional hierarchical organization structures (Benckler). In these new forms of virtual connectivities knowledge is found in the network rather than the individual or the institution. This is facilitated by a new form of digital scholarship based on an open-source culture of sharing knowledge and intellectual products (Davidson and Golderg 2009).

QUESTION?

Higher Education in a Web 2 World (JISC 2009) suggests Web 2 provides HE with the opportunity ‘seriously and systematically to begin the process of renegotiating the relationship between tutor and student, to bring about a situation where each recognises and values the other’s expertise and capability and works together to capitalise on it.’ The implications of this renegotiation means ‘drawing students into the development of approaches to teaching and learning’. How might this change of relationship be reflected in the new learning landscapes?

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- **Learning from Each Other: the scholarship of teaching and learning – evaluation plus research**

Those engaged in university space management and planning are well used to Post Occupancy Evaluations with a range of tools already available to facilitate this process. Learning Landscape suggests that learning how learning spaces are being used can be informed by research methodologies as well as the space management evaluation tools, i.e., not simply Post Occupancy Evaluation but an ongoing process of pedagogical research. The practice of research into effective teaching and learning practice has been firmly established through the notion of the scholarship of teaching and learning. The key to the effectiveness of the scholarship of teaching and learning is to challenge academics to consider their teaching activities in a research like manner, so as to inform their own teaching practice and to provide further intellectual stimulus and substance to the student experience.

QUESTION?

How can academics be encouraged to research the spatial character of their teaching and learning?

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