Learning Landscapes and the Idea of the University: Efficiency, Effectiveness and Expression

Teaching Centre report on the conference held at Queen Mary, University of London, 13 April 2010

Essentially held to launch a project report on contemporary/future developments in the learning and teaching environment, this event featured eight presentations bookended by introductory and concluding remarks from project participants.[[1]](#endnote-1)

The University of Lincoln project, conducted in collaboration with eleven other UK higher education institutions including Loughborough University, proffers a series of case-studies categorised using the following six headings: social learning spaces; social learning supported by students; experimental teaching spaces; research and teaching spaces; technology/media; and postgraduate provision. Indeed, the case study from Loughborough – the engCETL – is categorised as a social learning space. These case-studies helped to prompt debating points including innovation versus conservatism, support for strategic experimentation, academics and estates, and the student voice.

One of the most accessible presentations is supported by a draft paper provided by Prof Mike Neary (Centre for Educational Research and Development at the University of Lincoln), the project leader.[[2]](#endnote-2) Other papers saw presenters placing this subject in its historical and contemporary financial contexts, advocated the input of academics and students in the design process and as part of an ongoing conversation with estates and planners/architects (as well as other outsiders including the local community), promoted the integration of virtual and built resources, and attempted to theorise this subject.[[3]](#endnote-3)

Promoting the interplay between strategic experimentation, the use of technology, and social and emotional learning, the presentation by Prof Les Watson (former Pro Vice Chancellor, Glasgow Caledonian University) was particularly effective and provocative.[[4]](#endnote-4) The same applies to the three challenges posed by Prof Ginny Gibson (Head of School of Real Estate & Planning, University of Reading) – how do we know that we are using our space efficiently, ensure where individual parts fit into the whole, and link strategy to space – as well as her advice regarding how to facilitate the process and ensure its success: legacy; experimentation; diversity; governance; and communication.

One of the main functions of the project is to provide five change management tools:

1. the idea of the university;
2. pragmatics of place;
3. talking our future into being;
4. campus profiles;
5. teaching with space in mind.

Outlined in the project report, further details on these tools are available online on the project homepage at <http://learninglandscapes.blogs.lincoln.ac.uk>

The conference audience was mainly made up of colleagues from estates, architects, and academics; unfortunately, only one student was present, and there was also a dearth of IT specialists. However, it is clear that the ideas raised at this event and through the project report have a real resonance, including the durability and enduring significance of the learning landscape concept, a process which should accelerate and intensify in these straightened economic conditions rather than being sidelined.

In the light of the recent student engagement project for PQ Team, contacts will be followed up with attendees from the University of Lincoln, the University of Sussex, and Sheffield Hallam University. A subsequent meeting with Prof Simon Austin on the return train journey has also helped to signal some of the ways in which the Teaching Centre might continue to facilitate and promote this debate regarding learning space.

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1. Entitled *Learning Landscapes in Higher Education 2010: Clearing pathways, making spaces, involving academics in the leadership, governance and management of academic spaces in higher education*, this report will become available on the project homepage at <http://learninglandscapes.lincoln.ac.uk/> [14 April 2010]. A photocopy is provided with the paper version of this Teaching Centre conference report (see Appendix 1), as is a copy of the conference programme (see Appendix 2). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Entitled “Learning Landscapes in Higher Education – the struggle for the idea of the university: between research and reflexivity”, a copy is provided (see Appendix 3). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Although paper resources are not available for all of these presentations, there were PowerPoint slides on the current financial position (see Appendix 4); meanwhile, the theoretical paper on learning spaces will doubtlessly form part of Jos Boys, *Towards Creative Learning Spaces: Re-thinking the Architecture of Post-Compulsory Education* (Routledge, forthcoming November 2010). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Further information on his work is available at <http://www.leswatson.com> [14 April 2010].

   Addendum

   * the main Learning Landscapes project report (referred to as Appendix 1 in my conference report) – a publication entitled *Learning Landscapes in Higher Education 2010: Clearing pathways, making spaces, involving academics in the leadership, governance and management of academic spaces in higher education* – is available at <http://learninglandscapes.blogs.lincoln.ac.uk/files/2010/04/FinalReport.pdf>
   * the Learning Landscapes conference programme (Appendix 2) is available at <http://learninglandscapes.blogs.lincoln.ac.uk/files/2009/11/launchevent.pdf>
   * PPT slides for most of the papers (incl. those referred to as Appendix 3 & Appendix 4 in my conference report, which were given respectively by Mike Neary and David Chiddick) are available at <http://learninglandscapes.blogs.lincoln.ac.uk/learning-landscapes-conference-2010-queen-mary-university-of-london/>

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   10 May 2010 [↑](#endnote-ref-4)