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Huom! Tämä on rinnakkaistalenne.

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The White Space

Where is the White Space?

How often do teachers limit their pupils' or students' learning by over-planning teaching sessions or over-filling the curriculum? The concept of White Space for learning is that it deliberately builds and designs space into learning activities for learners to think, imagine and shape their own ideas and their own learning. Our intention is to introduce the concept of White Space by considering white space perspectives and initiate a dialogue by asking the question: Where is the White Space?

What is White Space as a concept?

The word 'space' suggests many concepts - in the world of learning and personal development, the term 'space' could mean

'room for growth'. In the world of education, we see White Space as a concept about deliberately (and strategically) leaving, 'room for thinking', 'room for creativity', 'room for learning'.

Developing a 'Less is More' strategy in teaching and learning

So often during presentations, workshops, teaching and even just during the waking day we do not provide time and space for ideas and concepts to be processed because of pressures of time and the requirement of modern society to fit as much as possible into every minute of the day. Before our professional lives crossed paths and as educators who have both seen many cycles of approaches and

initiatives in teaching and learning we had both, separately, reached a point where we were considering the importance of White Space and the philosophy that in teaching and learning, 'less is more'.

Steve's story - for some time as a teacher, headteacher and university lecturer I have been exploring different ways of empowering students to take greater responsibility for their own learning, in developing a model of transition from dependent to independent to inter-dependent learning for the pupils in my own primary school. I started to identify the personal skills and attributes, and dispositions to learning that are needed to enable learners to take greater control of what, when, where, how and with whom they might learn best.

I was also considering how we enable learners of all ages to have an authentic voice with regards to expressing their learning preferences. To support this kind of facilitation, I had been researching what the combined effect of higher levels of metacognition and increased self-efficacy can have on undergraduate and postgraduate students in becoming co-constructors of their learning. In schools I had become an advocate of reduced planning and allowing pupils to have an input into deciding what the learning objectives might be. At university, I specifically re-designed modules so that they had time, space and opportunity deliberately written in to the teaching sessions and module assessments for student input and student choice and voice. The concept of White Space had already started to take shape within my own teaching and consultancy work by the time I met Jori during his extended study visit to Staffordshire University from Tampere University of Applied Sciences, Finland in January 2015.

Jori's story - I have been a teacher in Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) in Finland for 25 years. I started as a lecturer, subsequently worked as a principal lecturer and head of (IME) study programme and finally, after PhD (Ed), started my third career and became teacher educator



in Tampere University of Applied Sciences. As typical in Finland, UAS teachers have - actually they must have - a prior career in business or administration out of school. I graduated MSc (Tech) and worked in industry as mechanical designer, design manager and director working in several companies. I have always considered myself being innovative. There is some evidence in industry and in education available to show that. When I started my teaching career, one of my subjects for engineering students (BSc) was 'enhancing creativity and innovative thinking'. As a teacher, I soon realised that learning and innovation processes have similarities. They both require White Space. I was not aware of that term then, though. But I found myself - later as a teacher educator - often using the expressions "less is more", "maximise cognitive process" and "give students time to think".

I met Steve during my teacher exchange visit in Staffordshire University in the spring 2015. From the first discussion onwards, I have enjoyed discussing and working with him. It seems we have a similar mindset and thoughts about how to process abstract phenomena.

Invitation to join the discussion about White Space

We would like to invite you to consider where is the White Space ... in your learning, in your life, in your teaching, in your students' learning etc.

At the end of this article you find a link to blog, where we would like you to engage with the discussion on White Space. One of our starting points for thinking about White Space was to ask one another the following questions. The bullet points are our initial responses but we know they are not complete. They just start the discussion we would like you

to join in with and share your thoughts with us. Where can White Space exist in teaching and learning? Can there be pauses in speaking to provide time for processing information and reflecting on its meaning? Should there be blank pages for doodles, places to go to, thinking and reflection, unplanned time for follow-up and follow-through, open doors, open minds, coaching conversations?

How could you use White Space to make learning more effective? Recognise the need for imagination, delay stating learning objectives - leave it as white space until midway through the learning activity, only plan (initially) for 50% of teaching time, stop talking, not too much (not too much confusion, not too long away from your comfortable zone), not too little right moment for it.

Why is White Space important and what is its meaning?

Where is the White Space ...for teachers and students to test out what competences students have learned, for students to engage and find their motivation (space for their own objectives, space to test their competences by facing real life problems), for teachers develop themselves, to benchmark other schools, to share ideas with colleagues "developing soulmates" in their schools? In other schools - even in other countries, to try new things and even fail, learn from failure and try again, for teacher groups, for leaders on various levels, in a student's mind for new understanding, for changing attitude, for considering different kinds of opinions (peers' opinions, ...), for self-reflection, to ask silly questions?

Where is the white space during lectures ...time for students to think (mulling?) test their ideas and under-

standing through discussion and debate? Where is the white space to relax?

Where is the space for teachers' authority and autonomy (power) and trust so that they can concentrate on developing, implementing and enquiring for themselves the results, the pros and cons, and to continue developing? Usually this process takes years.

We learned a great deal from running a workshop on Where is the White Space? at the recent Learning Teacher Network conference in Tallinn Estonia and it provoked discussion and dialogue for some time with participants after the workshop had finished, such as with Irmeli Halinen, until recently Head of Curriculum Development at the Finnish National Board of Education, Finland who helped us to deepen the dialogue and thinking including a magic moment when we considered the translation of the White Space term into Finnish: "Avara tila".

We realise that it has created more questions and we would like to widen and deepen the discussion by inviting you to visit the blog at <http://whereisthewhitespace.blogspot.fi/> and respond to any questions or statements you see there. Alternatively, you could pose your own question to widen and deepen the discussion.

In the blog, you can for example, find our reflections during and after the recent Learning Teacher Network conference in Tallinn and what we learned, what surprised us and what has motivated us to write this article.

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