



Learning space evaluation (1)

Research Officer Vicky Harte is evaluating the use of learning space at Old Broadcasting House

One of my research projects is evaluating the use of the learning space at Old Broadcasting House (OBH).

To enable me to do this effectively and get into the heart of the learning space I have adopted a multi-method approach to my research using both qualitative and quantitative methods. However, one method I am using is 'observations' to capture a visual representation of how individuals interact with the physical learning environment. This is the best and most interesting method because I'm seeing first hand how non-traditional 'core' teaching activities are being delivered in this extremely flexible space, in creative and non-didactic ways, which was the original intention of the space.

One observation I have undertaken very recently involved students from Landscape Architecture and the session leader, Fleure Gething, utilised portable screens to section off the large learning space into 'zoned' areas to enable groups of students to deliver presentations on their major design projects. The layout she adopted was both a creative and practical use of the space and enabled the objective of the teaching activity to be delivered in an effective and flexible way.

Come and use OBH for your creative core teaching activities – you'll think it's great too!

Learning space evaluation (2)

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As noted in a previous reflection I'm undertaking observations as one method for my research evaluating the use of the OBH learning space. I have recently undertaken another observation of students delivering presentations for their module assessments. The module is 'Integrative Studies' in the health subject area. The course leader is Dr Pauline Fitzgerald and she has taken a creative approach to the module. It is well known that one of the most difficult areas to embed enterprise pedagogy is health but Pauline has turned the module into just that in terms of the teaching, learning and assessment. The students' presentations were based on a 'Dragon's Den' type pitch and the amount of funds they were seeking was in the millions!

Of the presentations I observed, students were pitching ideas in relation to a meningitis b vaccine programme; a cure for type 1 diabetes; a service and device called 'CATCH' to detect STI's; and a vaccine to increase resistance to HIV in female prostitutes in an African red-light district. The students were highly 'enterprising' in their approach and delivered very

comprehensive pitches. Evidence of yet another successful utilisation of OBH in the facilitation of non-didactic core learning and teaching activity.

INGRES Day

In collaboration with Innovation North, NTI's Geoff Gifford, and Ingres Corporation we delivered interactive workshops in Old Broadcasting House (OBH) to exhibit many splendours of 'Open Source Technologies' (OST). Ingres is a leading provider of open source software. Open Source is all about 'freedom of use' and community development with software. Vicky continued her evaluation of the learning space at OBH and was impressed with the creative and practical use of the space. The participants were predominantly Leeds Met & RUN students with some attendees from industry and were split into groups to work in 'zoned' areas where they were introduced to interactive technologies such as databases; application development; openSOURCE; Java; Linux and business intelligence. The participants then loaded their own copy of the software onto their laptops wirelessly and were able to try applications first hand.

From an 'observation' perspective the learning space in OBH proved an excellent space for this type of event, predominantly because the large space enabled four interactive sessions to run simultaneously without causing disruption to each zoned area. However, what probably had the most impact and added value was the ability of the participants to interact the laptops wirelessly in this technologically driven activity."

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Learning Spaces Week

The notion of a learning environment can differ greatly between individuals, since it is integral to personal learning preferences. Higher education can offer individuals the opportunity to study in relation to their own personal learning preferences, with many different options of studying and learning both on and off campus. Mobile learning and e-learning are often seen as significant routes in adding value to and supporting learning. But what about the learning that takes place in the classroom, in the physical space? How does higher education understand and support the many individual personal preferences that we hear talked about so much, particularly by authors discussing learning theories?

It is these discussions that have sought to obtain answers about personal preferences and which have muddied the waters somewhat. The subject of the physical space has become increasingly complex and the argument can sometimes be riddled with anecdotal claims about how physical spaces must change from 'traditional classrooms' to 'new learning spaces', with very little evidence-based research to support these claims. Unfortunately, this brings us no nearer to understanding and pedagogically supporting personal learning

preferences in HE. [Learning Spaces Week](#) provides an opportunity for us to challenge our assumptions and discuss the evidence.

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An evaluation of the learning space at Old Broadcasting House, Leeds Metropolitan University

“What can students do in here that they can’t do anywhere else?” A research-informed evaluation of a non-traditional learning environment designed to enhance the ‘subject’ and ‘activities’ of enterprise education.

Background

The Institute for Enterprise seeks “to make Leeds Met first choice for students seeking enterprise teaching and learning across the whole range of academic disciplines offered”. In delivering this mission, the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) creates an inclusive community of academics, students, business support professionals, small businesses and employers, to act as an engine of change, locally, regionally and nationally, supporting the sharing and development of best practice and furthering an understanding of enterprise education. To further enhance this understanding of enterprise education, capital funding from HEFCE has been invested in the design of a non-traditional learning space at the Institute’s flagship building at Old Broadcasting House (OBH). Following the development of the learning space, an evaluation has explored the landscape and use of this non-traditional space. This research supports one of the key priorities of Leeds Metropolitan University’s assessment learning and teaching strategy (2008-09) i.e. the creative use of learning space.



Methodology

A number of different methodologies have been employed to obtain data from staff, students and other users of the space. Interviews have been undertaken with staff on a one-to-one and focus group basis; interactive workshops have been run with staff and a questionnaire has been developed for all users to self-evaluate their experiences. Observations have been carried out to investigate how the users interact with the physical learning environment.



All the participants involved in the qualitative element of the evaluation have used the space at least once since the evaluation began.

Results

The evaluation is still ongoing. However, some interesting results are emerging from the data obtained and have shown that users are benefiting from the physical environment and facilities available. Both internal and external users of the space have commented positively about their experience of OBH. Initial results show that such a learning space:

- Promotes active learning and teaching
- Affects students’ engagement in a positive way
- Valuable and integral support to classical learning and teaching methods
- Adaptable to diverse learning modes
- Offers blended learning opportunities
- Offers a flexibility not offered by a traditional ‘didactic’ type classroom
- Opportunity for students to experience a wider range of assessment, learning and teaching modes
- Potentially provide the impetus for the design of evolving pedagogy

Furthermore, in relation to the subject and teaching of enterprise education the space is proving to be fit for purpose i.e.

- Enables student-centred learning
- Enables group work and activities
- Real world business scenarios
- Business simulations/dissertation clinics
- The home of ‘Enterprise Week’ for Leeds
- Enterprise summer schools
- The application and study of the theory of enterprise and entrepreneurial behaviour

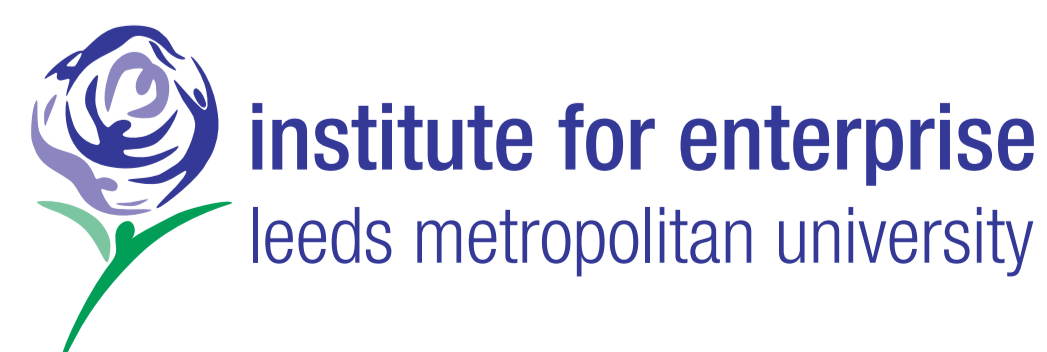
Aim

A number of aims highlight issues surrounding learning and teaching, the suitability of the space as a learning, teaching and assessment resource, what impact it has upon learning and teaching and whether it adds value. The evaluation explores how the space works in contributing to the student learning experience in relation to:



- how students learn in the space
- whether it promotes new learning modes
- whether it fosters social learning
- if it encourages informal learning
- the benefits and barriers of the space
- whether it provides the context and impetus for evolving pedagogies
- whether it supports prevailing pedagogies

Vicky Harte, Research Officer



www.leedsmet.ac.uk/enterprise

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