

**Title:** **People, Pedagogy and Place: the student (and staff) experience of a Learning Hub**

**Presenter:** **Emma Heron**  
Sheffield Hallam University

### **Abstract:**

#### **Session Learning Outcomes**

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

- evaluate the various uses of learning spaces in the Southbourne Learning Hub
- discuss the pros and cons of creative uses of learning spaces in general
- apply examples of their own practice

#### **Session Outline**

Key issues to be addressed are:

In September 2007, the Learning Hubs pilot was set up in the Faculty of Development & Society to provide a focus for localising and personalising the student experience and for providing an opportunity for staff to interact with their working space in different ways. The pilot was deemed a success and two further Learning Hubs were introduced in September 2008. This brought the total to four. This session focuses on one of the more established Learning Hubs, Southbourne, giving examples of the interesting dynamic between people, pedagogy and place, as well as sharing with delegates the challenges faced by being a Learning Hub Manager. The Learning Hub attempts to create 'personalised learning environments' (Ramsden, 2008) through the creative use of learning spaces and the efforts to develop interactions, identity and skills amongst the community of users. The Learning Hub is defined here as a physical building or space where certain subject disciplines are housed (for a similar discussion here, see Jamieson et al, 2005, on *learning precincts*). Each Learning Hub is linked to our virtual hub. The Learning Hub Manager has no direct line management duties but works through influence, encouragement and persuasion of staff and students to engage with the space.

Forging opportunities and developing ideas around learning and teaching have been made possible through the remit given to the Learning Hub Manager and the physical space available at Southbourne: space has an impact on learning (Oblinger, 2006). One of the key - and most challenging - aims of the Learning Hub is to develop a sense of identity and community. Developing learning communities that transcend subject disciplines (for example, support groups for mature students and one for staff new to research) have produced new groupings and events, whilst improving the physical space through posters and displaying of student work have enhanced individual subject group and discipline identity. The physical space has enabled staff to experiment and offer students different learning experiences, for example, by using the space for mock conferences and the assessing of student poster assignments. The decision to allow students to self-book particular rooms in Southbourne for individual or group study has enabled them to interact with their learning in ways beyond the seminar or lecture setting. Physical changes to the building through a major refurbishment have provided different opportunities to engage with subject matter: formally, for example, through the

setting up of a moot court and video conferencing; informally, through the locating of comfy chairs in otherwise 'dead spaces'. Encouraging staff and students to interact with their place and their learning has also been enhanced through two key developments: firstly, liaising closely with central University services, the Learning Hubs have provided students with career, study and library skills training sessions and for staff CPD opportunities; secondly, students following a particular module have had the opportunity to gain work experience within the Learning Hub, creating materials for dissemination to the Learning Hub community.

The Learning Hub provides opportunities - through the creative use of physical space - to develop learning identities, experiences and social and pedagogic interactions.

### **Session Activities and Approximate Timings**

Please provide an indication of how the session will be structured and how activities and discussion will be facilitated. For discussion papers please include a few indicative questions which will focus the discussion element.

20 minutes: Account of Learning Hub practice: what has been achieved, successes and the challenges. I will discuss this practice from an institutional as well as a personal-professional perspective.

25 minutes: Discussion. I would like to open the session up to Delegates, to offer the opportunity to answer questions about the paper and to share practice and thoughts.

As a guide, I set out the following questions as a way to stimulate discussion, although this is not an exhaustive list. Delegates will be given a few minutes to think about one (or more) of these questions and will then be invited to offer their views and/or experiences.

#### People

- How can we develop a new sense of community amongst existing, and strongly defined, sets of subject groups?
- What are the challenges to bringing about cultural change via the creative use of a learning space?
- Is a Learning Hub a Community of Practice, or is a Community of Practice a Learning Hub?
- Can physical space improve the staff and student experience?
- What are the issues surrounding 'management' in HE without formal management responsibilities?

#### Pedagogy

- How can we improve teaching and learning in more creative physical spaces?
- Is there a relationship between physical space and engagement?
- What is the balance between physical and virtual spaces in our teaching and learning?
- How do we best promote the creative use of learning spaces to the different constituencies of students and staff?

### **References**

Jamieson, P, Dane, J, Lippman, P (2005) *Moving beyond the classroom: Accommodating the changing pedagogy of higher education*, in: Referred Proceedings of 2005 Forum of Australasian Association for Institutional Research [online]. Last accessed on 28/03/09 at:

<http://www.aair.org.au/Forum2005/Jamieson.pdf>

Oblinger, D (2006) (ed) *Learning Spaces*. An Educause e-book, available online at url:

<http://www.educause.edu/books/learningspaces/10569>. Last accessed 25/03/09

Ramsden, P (2008) *The future of higher education teaching and the student experience*, DIUS [online] last accessed 29/03/09 at [http://www.dius.gov.uk/higher\\_education/shape\\_and\\_structure/he\\_debate/~media/publications/Summary-TeachingStudentExperience-Ramsden](http://www.dius.gov.uk/higher_education/shape_and_structure/he_debate/~media/publications/Summary-TeachingStudentExperience-Ramsden)

