Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (All Submissions)

0274

Reimagining campus spaces for academic peer learning and creativity – methods of an interdisciplinary project

Sarah Dyer[1], Lewis Winks[1], Nick Green[2]

[1]University of Exeter, Exeter, United Kingdom [2]On Off, London, United Kingdom

Research Domain: Academic practice ,work, careers and cultures (AP)

Abstract: This poster describes the methods used for an interdisciplinary research project investigating how campus spaces could be used to foster innovation, creativity, and peer learning in education practice.

The research involved collaboration between an urban designer (Nick) and two human geographers (Sarah and Lewis). The poster describes the methods we developed and is illustrated with images of the workbooks, photos, and maps that were produced to facilitate data collection.

Paper: This poster describes the methods used for an interdisciplinary research project investigating how campus spaces could be used to foster innovation, creativity, and peer learning in education practice (Winks, Green, and Dyer, submitted). Examples of the workbooks, maps, and photos produced during the project are used to illustrate the richness of the approach.

Research aims

During the summer of 2018, an urban designer held a visiting 'Arts and Culture' fellowship at the Exeter Education Incubator. The Incubator is a cross institutional initiative which supports academics and professional service staff (called Incubator fellows for the duration of their projects) to undertake education innovation projects. During the 'Arts and Culture' fellowship, the urban designer (Nick) worked with Incubator staff (Lewis and Sarah, both of whom are human geographers) to design and undertake research on Incubator fellows' experiences and to explore how campus spaces could be used to foster increased peer learning and creativity in education practices. The impetus for the project came from a desire to think about whether, and how, the values and impacts of events (such as capstone writing retreats and knowledge cafés) (Winks and Dyer, submitted) could be extended/exposed in our more 'everyday' practices. We chose the route of an 'Arts and Culture' fellowship because we wanted to engage with productive interdisciplinary and creative practices ourselves. These are fellowships supported by the Arts and Culture team that facilitate collaboration between creative practitioners and the university.

Creativity in contemporary universities is double edged. As the conference call for papers argues, university managerialism stifles creativity through its risk aversion and metrics obsession. It also tends to individualise creativity and productivity. Yet at the same time universities demand increasing innovation from academics. In their roles as educators, the pressure to innovate in education practice, intensifies with increasing marketization (Brown, 2015; Macdonald & Stratta, 2001). The Incubator, and indeed this research project, is interested in supporting meaningful innovation through building communities of interest and practice and 'brave spaces' which value learning, creativity, and community. The project explores the 'urban design' observation that communities connect, or otherwise, both formally and informally conditioned by (campus) design. The physical manifestation of the campus remains in the most part, a major obstacle to communities of practice taking hold within universities (Jamieson, 2003).

Methodology

The research project methods build on the work of urban designers, architects and artists, whose methods typically include numerous site visits, photographs of public spaces, and the mapping of physical and built features, as well as patterns observed in the way people use the space.

The research aim, to explore fellows' experiences and routines of campus spaces posed a challenge to cherished observational design approach for establishing an understanding of a study site. Access to the spaces used by academics and professional service staff, often interior spaces, wasn't a given. Moreover the lived experiences of everyday routines was not obviously accessible through observation. The research team worked at adapting methods, drawing on the multidisciplinary perspectives and values.

A series of in-depth interviews became the mechanism for collecting data. Nick undertook interviews with 12 fellows from all six academic colleges in the university across a three-week period. Interviews with each participant centred on a workbook with 10 exercises. These prompted academics to describe the campus spaces they occupied and their daily pattern of their occupation of the campus. The interviews used the tools and conventions of the architectural and design profession, such as the plan drawing or the site plan. These tools supported discussions which otherwise might have been taken for granted or overlooked, as interviewees used drawing as well as words. These drawings proved a catalyst for richer verbal descriptions of space than may have otherwise been the case in a purely verbal interview. As it is difficult to directly observe academics' patterns of use, these were instead recorded through the stories and information recounted in the discussion and drawing exercises.

Interviews were accompanied by Nick's observations of office spaces and department buildings during and directly following the interviews. As the majority of interviews were conducted in the offices of the academics, access in a practical sense was granted both into this intimate setting of this

space, as well as the department building. These meetings were also used as an opportunity to photograph the communal and shared spaces between offices where important moments of contact between colleagues occur.

Analytical approach

Interviews were transcribed and coded thematically. Drawn materials produced as part of the interview process, including sketches of academic's office spaces, maps describing patterns of use on campus, typical term-time and out-of-term working schedules, etc., were also reviewed, collated and coded. Nick then produced architectural drawings attempting to describe the points raised in the interviews and enable reflection upon the key spatial and environmental features at play in both the challenges to, and successful moments of collaboration between academic peers described. These drawings were reviewed and discussed between the research team and subsequently a series of design principles were developed reflecting the information gathered in these multiple forms.

References

Brown, R. (2015). The Marketisation of Higher Education: Issues and Ironies. Retrieved from https://www.uwl.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Departments/Research/new_vistas/vol1_iss1/vol1_iss1_art1_23April2015.pdf

Jamieson, P. (2003). Designing more effective on-campus teaching and learning spaces: A role for academic developers. International Journal for Academic Development, 8(1-2), 119-133.

Macdonald, C., and Stratta, E. (2001). From access to widening participation: responses to the changing population in higher education in the UK. Journal of Further and Higher Education, 25(2), 249-258.

Winks, L., Green, N. and Dyer, S. (submitted). Activating innovation and creativity in educational practice: Reimagining spaces for peer learning. Studies in Higher Education.

Winks, L. and Dyer, S. (submitted). Writing, talking, eating: Nurturing spaces and cultures of pedagogic creativity in higher education. Higher Education Research and Development.