



Edge Hill University

SOLSTICE

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Spaces for learners and learning: Evaluating impact

SOLSTICE flexible learning space

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- Requirements and development of SOLSTICE flexible learning space
- Process of evaluation and initial outcomes
- Considerations

“By assigning individual places it made possible the supervision of each individual and the simultaneous work of all...It made the educational space function like a learning machine...”

Foucault (1977)



- One of 74 HEFCE funded CETLs
- Focus on supported online and blended learning
- Enhancement of learning experience and environment for students, inc. development of:
 - Social learning space in Learning Resource Centre (LRC)
 - Flexible learning space
- Evaluation and research (process as well as output)



Brief - development of a 'flexible' space for:

- Teaching and learning (classroom environment)
- Staff development
- Meetings/ discussion

Solution determined by:

- Understanding of what we already had (and wanted to change!)
- Literature
- Other institutions (seeing is believing)
- Understanding of what we wanted to provide and achieve



Existing spaces -
examples



SOLSTICE learning space



Module chosen for evaluation – Foundation Degree module running over 10 weeks

Ethnographic approach – focus on student and tutor experiences (reflections, narratives)

- Observation of session
- Student focus group interview...followed by further paper-based questions
- Tutor reflections

NB. Tutor well-liked and extremely capable!

Theme 1 - Environmental factors



Environmental factors important to learners:

- Early recollections – hard seats, echoing rooms
- Experiences of previous sessions in ‘poor’ rooms (comparisons with SOLSTICE space)
- Students highlighted – noise and movement; sighting of equipment/ technology; seating and space; temperature; space to work

“Physical environments influence how we feel, hear, and see. Those factors, in turn, influence cognitive and affective performance.”

Jensen (2005)

Theme 2 – Integrating technology



- Observed that use of technology more integrated as laptops enabled appropriate use, and flexibility of how students used them
- Tutor felt that it was easier to model specific use of technologies – at point of need, students working together, tutor sitting with students
- Learning support activities successful – e.g. searching and retrieving information/ resources
- Some login issues
- Use of whiteboards!

NB – Students feeling IT'd out – previous ICT session

Theme 3 – Impact on learning



No-one could conclusively say that space made difference to learning, but...

- Conducive to group work and sharing...although *“...the integration of group activities with traditional learning tasks has been found to have a significant positive effect on learning”* Jensen (2005)
- Space ‘more democratic’, with tutor *“less likely to assume role of expert”* – although IWB tutor control
- Tutor became *“more aware of learners’ experience of the space as a factor in the learning experience”*
- Students felt comfortable – group tables major factor – comfort = safety = risk-taking?



...for developing flexible learning spaces?

- Don't ignore environmental factors
- Flexibility is key
- Technology important (but does not necessarily have to be dominant or extensive)

...for evaluating flexible learning spaces?

- Effectiveness of ethnography for evaluating students' experiences and impact on learning

References

Foucault, M. (1977) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Allen and Lane (reprinted by Penguin, 1991)

Jensen, E. (2005) *Teaching with the Brain in Mind*.
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