Session 7.1: Interactive Workshop

A Landscape for Learning: developing shared student-staff understanding of processes of learning in the Creative Arts

“What does our pedagogy reveal, intentionally or otherwise, about the habits of head, hand and heart we purport to foster in our disciplines? Is there, or should there be, a consistent connection between the way a discipline creates or discovers new knowledge and the way it apprentices new learners?”


1. The context

At the start of 2014-15, the School of Creative Arts at the University of Hertfordshire began a project aiming to foster a culture of conversation about learning and teaching among staff, and between staff and students. The inspiration for this was partly pragmatic (responding to immediate issues in NSS, etc.) but also, and primarily, idealistic: we wanted to create spaces for dialogue about what it means to teach and learn within art, design, media and music. Out of this dialogue, we hoped to develop approaches and materials that would lead to more incremental processes of enhancement. At the start of the project, an illustration was produced (above) that showed what we collectively saw as the ‘landscape for learning’ within our subject areas:

- Learning in Creative Arts is challenging, exciting and transformative.
- The process of learning is central to your development and will involve looking, listening, exploring, selecting, investigating, playing, experimenting and reflecting.
- Making mistakes is an important part of the learning. Living in a context of uncertainty is part of the process and will be both uncomfortable and exhilarating!
- You will need to be curious, resilient, self-directed, proactive and prepared to take risks.
- You will need to seek out and respond to feedback from a range of sources and then develop the confidence to make your own decisions about your work.

Dr Rebecca Thomas, Dr Ivan Phillips, Prof Joy Jarvis and Karen Clark
• Creating and communicating your ideas will involve both connecting to the work of others and showing difference. It will involve big ideas and detailed, careful production.
• You will shape yourself as a creative artist, designer or technologist through working in a community of learners and you will shape this community by being part of it.

The illustration, created by Joel Cooper from this initial summary, has now become the basis for a set of ‘action cards’ which are used by several programmes as part of student induction and transition activities.

2. The activity
This workshop offers a (very brief) opportunity to explore your sense of the ‘landscape for learning’ within your own subject area.

Taking our illustration as a starting point, think about aspects of teaching and learning within your own subject area that you consider to be:

• shared (these are likely to appear on our illustration);
• distinct (these are likely to be missing from our illustration, and might be thought of as your ‘signature pedagogies’).

Record your ideas using the materials provided, the aim being to create a new landscape of learning from the collective discussion.

Ideally, you will be able to work in pairs or small groups, linked by subject interests – or even in groups of mixed interests, which could lead to some revealing conversations…. Feel free, however, to work individually if this seems like the most productive approach.

After 15 minutes we will see what everyone has come up with!

3. The discussion
For the last part of the workshop we will share ideas that have emerged during the ‘landscaping’ activity. In particular, the aim will be to:

• present some examples of how we have used the landscape within our own practice;
• discuss some possibilities for how you might develop and use your own landscape for learning.

Let’s hope that we can inspire each other…

Dr Rebecca Thomas, Dr Ivan Phillips, Prof Joy Jarvis and Karen Clark