

STUDENT-CENTERED, STUDENT-FOCUSED, STUDENT-DRIVEN LEARNING SPACES



A Report

We began with a general discussion about student-centered, student-focused, student-driven learning spaces. We were fluid about the particular programmed learning spaces we were thinking about—a lecture hall, a lab, a makerspace, whatever. Our feeling was that the ideas we were discussing span many different kinds of learning and learning spaces, from libraries to spaces for career counseling and mentoring.

Several metaphors emerged that were quite useful, but we would like to share with you the idea of a stage or stage set, a learning space as a space in which engagements happen, where different kinds of engagements happen, those that make possible a certain kind of learning that we desire for our students. These spaces are engaging. They are emotional. They have drama associated with them. They are memorable and ultimately enable meaningful experiences.

Thinking metaphorically was helpful for us. Thinking about the “stage” as a metaphor for learning spaces, we talked about how these stages as learning spaces are shared between faculty and students, about how in an ideal world these would be stages in which faculty are giving up control, are actually learning along with students. This would be a world in which faculty are partly responsible for setting the stage and creating the experience, a world in which the students also have some responsibilities, some autonomy and some control. It is a world in which students are given opportunities to shape what will be happening on the stage.

We talked about such spaces as being transient in nature, meaning this in a very positive way. These are spaces that are dynamic, alive, with different kinds of engagements coming and going. Groups are nesting in different parts of these spaces, then as they fledge—fly away, if you will—others will come and nest.

There will be a transitory sense on different scales, from the café and social spaces up to the levels of nesting, homing, fledging and more. Along the way, the sense of space as stage attends to important ideas of visibility—not just the visibility of the activity itself, but also to the outcome of that activity. There is an overall sense of visibility that celebrates and values what is happening on the stage.

It seems critical to have an institutional priority that in the actual pursuit of spaces for learning, students have a primary role as stakeholder, influencer, and participant.



Gross Hall for Interdisciplinary Innovation - Duke University
Firm: Lord Aeck Sargent

During the final session of each of the LSC Roundtables, working groups reported on their discussion, sharing their questions and ideas with colleagues in the room. We are excerpting, from the transcripts, reports to share with the broader LSC community.

We are talking about visibility that is social in the sense of what is happening here at this roundtable. We are thinking that seeing what is happening is how learning happens. We are thinking about the question of why, about creating memorable emotional and social engagements for our students, about the metaphor of the stage for learning in that it signals how such a space allows for spanning differences, enabling different modes of interaction. This is what learning is about.

These are notions utterly absent in a traditional lecture hall, where if you blink you miss whatever profound moment might happen because right before was nothing and right after is nothing and for only a moment was it something.

We are thinking, that for planning and spaces to be effective, it is important to elevate students as full partners into the activity, and that students understand that they have a role in their own learning, that they can become central players on the stage. This is why learning spaces matter.

Why is this an important question for planners to address?

Times are changing.

Not only do we believe this kind of interaction is at the heart of learning, we also believe students today are coming to expect a different kind of interaction than students in the past. A thread in our discussion was to recognize the norms and behavior and physiology of how students learn today. They're up after noon and they're down at 3:00 a.m.

They need a world—a stage for learning—that is responsive to their needs, their patterns, their transitoriness. Today's students are expecting something more entrepreneurial—in their learning and in their learning environment. They are expecting spaces that allow for and promote the opportunity for students to imagine their own role on the stage. That perk comes in the nature of the visibility of the space, of its dynamism. "I can totally see myself here doing this." They look for places in which they can imagine their own role because they can see other students in that role.

Comments, Questions and Conversations with Roundtable Colleagues

If spaces reflect such basic human interactions, then the pedagogy can fill in as needed, as supported. Spaces can be transformed over the course of a day or an evening to serve many different ways of learning. How does this happen?

We started thinking too small, about spaces that were more temporal, but eventually decided—like others here at this roundtable—that achieving such spaces had to reflect campus-wide values. There has to be an institutional priority for spaces that are student-centered. From the perspective of planning, it seems critical to have an institutional priority that in the actual pursuit of spaces students have a primary role as stakeholder, influencer, and participant.

So, our bottom line is involving students in planning as advocates, with faculty somewhat stepping back and making room for students, peers, colleagues and all potential users and stakeholders to have a role in the planning of the stage for learning.

I am thinking about spaces that can serve a variety of learners, of ways of learning. I am wondering how we can stop building sorts of single-use spaces like makerspaces, like digital media labs. Are there ways that we can have spaces accommodate multiple kinds of activities? What comes to mind is a space that can be furnished with a Murphy bed ...coming down with all the tools and whistles for one kind of activity that can be put away and opened up for another.

— David Woodbury,
NSCU Hunt Library
LSC Roundtable at
North Carolina State
University

When I think about questions students might ask about spaces, they are: Is this a green building? Is it net zero? Is it full of daylight? Is it burning fossil fuels all the time? These questions may not have much to do with planning spaces for learning, but they do have something to do with how the students have an overall feel of the building.

We did not talk about that explicitly, but you do emphasize the importance of understanding values students bring to the table. These are issues being discussed on campuses anyway today and attention to learning spaces in the process of planning learning spaces is an opportunity to "seize the moment," as it were.

In thinking about the transitoriness of spaces, we thought also about the importance of different scales of permanence, about having spaces that have the kind of presence that people just want to be in. We think of this presence as having a certain timelessness, a relationship to nature, a relationship to place, but a presence that allows the building to be a living building internally. We shared experiences of spaces that are full of couches, literally a living space, a living room, if you will.



From the LSC Archives

