

# THINKING METAPHORICALLY ABOUT SPACES FOR LEARNING

## REPORTING OUT: A ROUNDTABLE GROUP

"We began with an overarching discussion about student-centered, student-focused, student-driven learning spaces. We were fluid about the particular spaces we were thinking about: a lecture hall, lab, makerspace, whatever. **Our feeling was that the ideas we were discussing spanned many different kinds of learning and learning spaces, from libraries to spaces for career counseling, and more.**

**Several metaphors emerged early on that were quite useful. We would like to share one with you: the metaphor of a stage or stage set.** Our thought is that "stage" is an appropriate metaphor for a learning space as it is a space in which various engagements happen—engagements that make possible the kind of learning we desire for our students. Spaces as stages have drama associated with them. These spaces ultimately enable meaningful and memorable experiences of learning."

**"Thinking metaphorically was helpful, perhaps a bit audacious.** We talked about how stages are understood as places where faculty give up control and actually learn along with students—where faculty are partly responsible for setting the stage and creating the experiences, but where students also have responsibility to shape what happens on the stage. **Students will be elevated and visible as full partners in planning just as they will have been given the central role as players on the stage.**

It seems critical that institutions prioritize the role of students as stakeholders, influencers, and participants in imagining, planning, and assessing learning spaces.

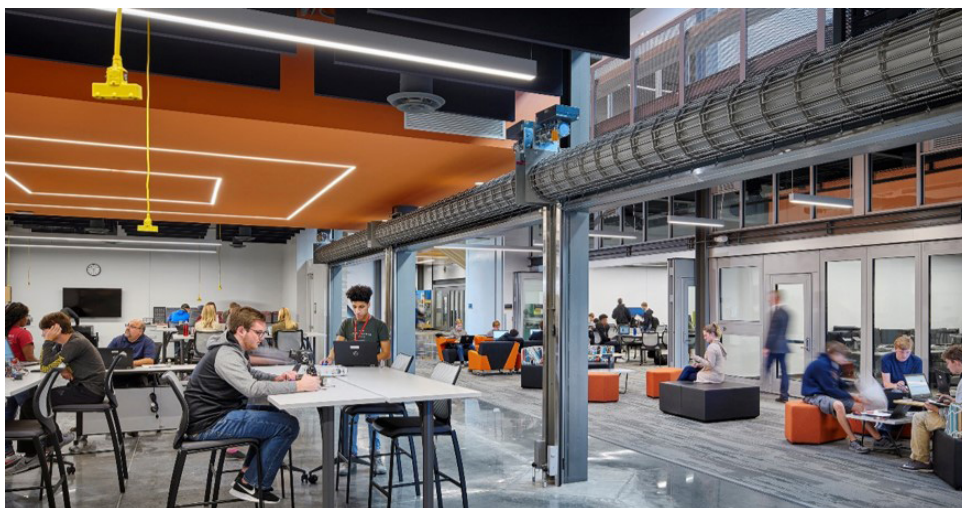
*I am thinking about spaces that can serve a variety of learners, ways of learning.*

*I am wondering if there are ways that 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, North Carolina State University



Gould Evans - Missouri Innovation Campus



**Imagining a space as a stage means considering it to be transient, in a very positive way. These spaces would be dynamic, alive, with different kinds of engagements emerging and dissolving. Groups would nest in different parts of these spaces, and as they fledge—fly away, if you will—others would come and nest.**

There will be a transitory sense on different scales, spaces for nesting, homing, fledging and more. Along the way, the idea of space as stage attends to the important attribute of visibility—not only the visibility of the activity itself but also of the outcome of that activity. There would be a visibility that celebrates and values what is happening on the stage.”



Photo Courtesy Wendy Newstetter

**“There was a social visibility in what is happening at this roundtable: we are seeing, experiencing how learning happens. We are here exploring the question of why and how to create spaces for experiences of engagement that are memorable and emotional. The metaphor of the stage works for us because it signaled how such a space allows for spanning and overcoming differences, enabling different modes of interaction. This is what learning is about. This was what we are doing here.”**

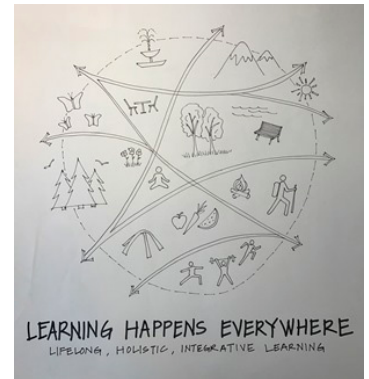
“Such a metaphor to drive planning is utterly absent when the focus is on a traditional lecture hall. Most often, in such spaces no engagement is expected. They are spaces in which profound moments tend to be missed because right before that moment there was nothing, right after nothing, and only for a moment was there something happening. Learners are audiences, not participants, in the action on the stage.”

“Why is this an important metaphor for driving planning now and into the future?”

**“Times are changing. We now understand that engagement and interaction is at the heart of learning; we also have a better understanding of how students today are different from those of past—even recent—generations.** We also have a better understanding of the norms and behaviors, the physiology of how students learn today—they’re up after noon and they’re down at 3:00 a.m.

They are expecting something more entrepreneurial— in how and where they learn. They are expecting spaces that allow for and promote opportunities to imagine their role on stage. That opportunity comes in the nature of the visibility of the space, its dynamism. They look for places in which they can imagine their own role because they can see other students in that role in that space.+

**“Our bottom line, our audacious strategy, is to involve students in planning, with faculty somewhat stepping back and giving students and other stakeholders a prominent role in creating the stages for learning.”**



Rebecca Sharkey, EHDD  
An Institutional Roundtable at the California  
State University, Los Angeles



2016 LSC Roundtable  
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